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LADY BELL

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VOL. III.

LADY BELL

A Story of Last Century

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CITOYENNE JACQUELINE"

IN THREE VOLS.—III.

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CHAPTER I.

SECRETS AT SUMMERHILL.

AT last the day came to an end.

Caro, with every other likely interruption, was disposed of. Evening, with its atmosphere of peace and trust in such a home, descended on the jarring of cross purposes and the tenacity of individual cares.

The two young women, sitting at each side of their hearth, where the crackling leaping wood fire was acceptable, appeared to be under a strong necessity of growing confidential.

Lady Bell would open the ball. Before putting in a petition for those at sea in her prayers for the night she would make her

confession. After a conscious pause she said suddenly—

“Sunny, I know you do not approve of secrets.”

Mrs. Sundon started.

“When did I say there must be no secrets?” she asked sharply. “I should think there have been plenty of secrets where you and I were concerned, with regard to which the one has not interfered with the other.”

Lady Bell was taken aback by the tone ; but she was full of her own intended recital, which was so happy in its essence.

“Yes,” she answered softly ; “but these were old secrets before we knew each other, or before we were friends. Later, Sunny, you said there should be no secrets.”

“I must have been an idiot to say so !” exclaimed Mrs. Sundon, still speaking abruptly, and with asperity. “Who can tell what a day or an hour may bring forth ? In place of believing that there cannot be freedom of intercourse where secrets are

suffered to exist, I believe that there cannot be real freedom where there must not be secrets. I say this, Lady Bell," proceeded Mrs. Sundon more calmly, "that you may not be misled into telling me your secrets under the delusive impression that I shall return the compliment by telling you mine."

"I am not a child, to think of giving and taking secrets in that fashion," protested Lady Bell, feeling herself repulsed, and with her affection and dignity alike wounded. "I can keep my secrets—sure I would not force them on anybody," she said, with her heart swelling under conflicting emotions.

Lady Bell had a great longing to disburden herself to her friend, and be, as she fully believed, not blamed only, but made much of, cried over, wished joy over (as only an old servant had wished Lady Bell joy).

But she had also an importunate sense that the secret which Mrs. Sundon despised was not Lady Bell's alone, but his, who was worthy of all respect, because if their

hastily contracted marriage was a folly which he had committed, it was the first folly in him that she had heard of, and it had been committed for love of her.

She remembered that she had never made the faintest appeal to his sympathy in vain.

“At least, sleep on your secrets, Bell, dear. That will be the wisest plan,” said Mrs. Sundon, yawning. “I have been keeping early hours since you went, and I am certain that you have need of rest.”

Mrs. Sundon lit the bed-chamber candle with her own hand, and offered it and a kiss to Lady Bell, both of which she took coldly.

If Lady Bell was not a child to barter secrets, neither was she a child to be coaxed out of just surprise and indignation, and sent to bed as the fitting finale.

Mrs. Sundon's behaviour might arise from overmuch caution and scrupulous integrity; but it could hardly spring from an excess of friendship. Evidently she did not

wish to receive the information which Lady Bell was so willing to bestow, either because she was doubtful of its nature, and might not know how to deal with it, or because she was not disposed to reciprocate it.

For the first time in the course of their friendship Lady Bell had reason to call Mrs. Sundon a little cold-hearted and hard. Accordingly, Lady Bell retreated to her room, holding up her head, and stepping out in dudgeon—the height of which certainly helped to qualify her disappointment, then went to bed and fell fast asleep, to dream brightly of Harry Fane.

Lady Bell awoke in the middle of the night and the darkness, to a half-sleepy perception of people moving about in the house, of doors opened and shut, of whispers in which a man's voice, though subdued, was still distinctly audible and conspicuous in a household of women (for the Summerhill man-servant slept in a loft outside). It was this voice which had mingled with and helped to shape Lady Bell's dreams. As

Lady Bell became more widely awake she began to marvel and grow alarmed.

Why was not all the house at rest at the dead of night? Who was this man that was speaking to somebody in the room below, shuffling along the passage, and tampering with the bolts of the front door?

These were the days of daring robberies and brutal burglaries—on the highways, in shops, in private houses, especially in suburban houses, slightly guarded like Summerhill.

The absence of heavy plunder did not avail. A servant girl, answering a knock at a door on a chain, had been dragged half way through the opening that her pocket might be cut away. A tradesman had been knocked down and left insensible, that the silver buckles might be taken from his shoes.

No dread of punishment deterred burglars from their prey. Every justice-court and assize, every cross-road and square before the county-town gaols abounded with

the grisly fruit of such punishment, to no purpose so far as the putting down of crime was concerned. Some other means must be found before safety and peace took the place of insecurity and violence.

The news-prints of the next week might contain the account of the breaking into of "Summerhill, by Lumley," the residence of two ladies of distinction, a child, and their female servants, with whom the mistresses were rash enough to lodge alone.

The gang of lawless wretches who would commit such a crime, might not have contented themselves with ransacking the house and making themselves masters of whatever money and articles of value it contained, which they could carry away, but in order to render their escape more secure, and to delay pursuit, might have murdered in their beds the poor women whom the "monsters" could not gag into helplessness.

The news-prints would contain the particulars, which would be studied by many

readers with much the same attraction of horror which belongs in quieter times to the sensational romance, deepened in this case by the impressive knowledge that not only the story was true, but that it might be the personal experience of any one of the readers before his or her life were ended. There might be a little special luxury of public indignation and pity, which in modern speech would be branded as snobbish, connected with the facts. These two murdered gentlewomen would not only be young, of great personal attractions, estimable in their way, with a peculiar interest attached to them from having retired from the great world of which they had been the ornaments to lead lives of simplicity, self-improvement, beneficence, and the enjoyment of each other's congenial society, but in addition to every other cause of canonisation, the victims would be women of high quality, one of them bearing an ancient and honourable title.

Here and there a reader would recognise

the names as those of familiar friends, and be startled and shocked for half a day or half an hour.

One reader many months thence might be struck to the heart, more effectually than by shot or shell.

But nobody, not even Captain Fane, would regard the revolting calamity as very wonderful or unprecedented in its occurrence.

These reflections, which have taken some time to write, flashed in a second across Lady Bell's mind, and curdled her warm blood. She lay trembling and listening for a few seconds longer, and then she sprang from her bed with an instinctive determination that she would not lie still and be murdered there; she would do something to save her life, for herself and her dear husband, far away, and unaware of her danger.

It might not be too late to rouse the house and scare the villains. Lady Bell felt about for her mantle, thrust

her feet into slippers, slid open her door.

A stream of light fell across the lobby from a candle flaring on the first landing-place.

The thieves must be going about their work deliberately, but at least the illumination would serve to show Lady Bell her foes, and would give her courage to fly to Mrs. Sundon's room, which was at the end of the corridor.

What if Lady Bell found the door fastened?

The apprehension caused her to call out in trying the handle, "Let me in, Sunny, something is wrong; for God's sake let me in."

The handle turned, and Lady Bell, by her own impetuosity nearly falling headlong into the room, found it empty, and its bed empty.

Had Sunny been awakened first? Had she gone down and met her fate? The idea was enough to convulse Lady Bell with

fresh horror, if it had not been that, simultaneously with this flight of her imagination, her senses conveyed to her the distinct impression that there were no marks of disturbance, on the part of the late occupant, in the room itself. A rushlight remained burning quietly; no clothes were pulled down at random and tossed about. There was not even a trace of the clothes which had been lately worn by Mrs. Sundon lying neatly folded and in their proper place.

It dawned upon Lady Bell that Mrs. Sundon had not undressed, and another instant's inspection added the evidence that the bed had not been slept in.

Lady Bell rubbed her eyes, bent her head, and listened. The clock in the parlour was at that moment striking two o'clock.

Lady Bell had not been wrong with regard to the hour, that it was the middle of the night, though she dismissed with thankfulness the one overwhelming fear of robbers.

But what was this watching for? Why had Sunny renounced her pointedly-mentioned habit of keeping early hours? Why was she not abed when she seemed courting sleep? Had she fallen asleep over a book, or taken a "turn," and fallen ill instead?

Lady Bell looked curiously over the banisters in time to see the house door, which must have been ajar, pushed gently open, and Mrs. Sundon, with a shawl round her shoulders, a handkerchief tied over her head, and such a dark lantern as a conspirator might have carried in his hand, come in from the darkness and the night dews.

At a slight movement—the creaking of a board—Mrs. Sundon looked up and caught sight of a blooming face, recovered from its brief blanching, rosy from sleep, the eyes yet winking away the appalling visions which they had conjured up. The whole was set in a night-cap which seemed to reverse the usual arrangements of night-caps, for it was close under the round little

chin, and had an aperture gathered together by an imposing bow and ends of muslin on the very top of the head.

Mrs. Sundon closed the slide of the lantern with a clink, reducing the lower lobby to darkness, and leaving Lady Bell in the character of "Peeping Tom," nowhere.

Mrs. Sundon came with unhesitating steps up-stairs, and taking the first word of scolding, accosted Lady Bell impatiently, scornfully, and angrily.

"What on earth are you doing here at this hour, Bell? Do you mean to rouse the house? Do you wish to catch your death of cold?"

"And what are you doing there, Sunny?" retorted Lady Bell. "Are you in the custom of keeping lights burning, and not going to bed, but taking walks in the middle of the night?"

"I knew I could not sleep," explained Mrs. Sundon curtly and haughtily. "Somebody had told me that the nightingale was heard already, and that there were glow-

worms to be seen in the lane just opposite our gate. I wished to try the truth of the story. I thought a mouthful of fresh air might compose me before I lay down. Where was the harm or the marvel? Back with you to bed, Bell, and don't stand shivering there."

Where was the harm and the marvel, indeed, except that nightingales don't ordinarily sing in March, or glow-worms keep delicate young women from their beds, and except in the change that had come over Sunny, which included in it all sorts of misgivings and anxieties.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. SUNDON'S NEWS.

A SECOND refreshing sleep, and the broad bright March morning light were potent as ever in dispelling Lady Bell's doubts and fears of the previous night.

When she went down to breakfast and found Mrs. Sundon, though looking somewhat worn in the clear searching sunshine, calmly open and kind as ever, Lady Bell was fain to tell herself that she had been morbid and fanciful, and that there could have been nothing in her friend's manner and actions on the previous night to bewilder and alarm her.

As a culmination to every other morning

cheer, Lady Bell had acquired a secret well-spring of happiness. Had she not Harry Fane? Was she not his? They might be parted for a longer time than she cared to reckon, but that did not annul facts. She had always him to think of; she was free, if ever woman were free, to think of this man, and to cherish his image, till he was restored to her.

And the thinking of Harry Fane, with the full right and title to do so, even as he might be thinking of Lady Bell on the deck of his frigate, out at sea, was still so new a privilege, so unimpaired by the sickness of hope deferred, the sense of the aching void of a mere phantom, that it was very sweet to Lady Bell.

She strolled out into the grounds of Summerhill, to indulge in the privilege more at her ease, and with less danger of the thread of her reverie being broken.

Mingling pleasantly with the reverie, and fitting into it, without any conscious will of hers, was the notice which she gave, with a

dreamy smile, to every bud and plant of her old sphere of operations in the walks, the wilderness, and the floral knots.

She had not forgotten one of them, she was not unfaithful to them, but they were achievements of a past age, and of another world.

What a child she had been, to be sure, when she was so taken up with these trifles! As if she were not a child yet, in her hopefulness, her fearlessness, especially when a happy thought entered into her meditative, ingenious brain, and she clasped her hands with herself on the idea.

She would, with these busy little hands, trace out, by a living, growing outline of fragrant herbs — thyme, mint, basil — the figure of a ship, the *Thunderbomb*; none but she would touch it, or, for that matter, understand its significance. Her hands would shape it, preserve it in shape, and keep it free from weeds, until *he* came back at last to take her to himself, when she would bring him here to this sequestered corner,

and clasping his arm, show him her version of the *Thunderbomb*.

She would set about it this very moment, as the first beginning of the glad ending. Thus, though she was not provided with her garden gloves, apron, or basket, she would not wait till she had fetched them, but started energetically to collect her materials.

“Are you attempting something already, Bell, in this out-of-the-way corner?” asked Mrs. Sundon’s full voice at Lady Bell’s back.

“I am going to plan out the figure of a ship, Sunny,” said Lady Bell, stopping short, and turning round, panting and glowing from her exertions.

Surely the moment of explanation had come, for the next question, which Lady Bell alike wished and dreaded, must be, “Why a ship, my water-nymph?”

But the question was not put; instead of putting it, Mrs. Sundon laid her hand heavily on Lady Bell’s shoulder, and said with a sigh, “I am sorry to interrupt you,

my dear, when you are so agreeably occupied, but there is something which I should like to say to you."

Lady Bell dropped the herbs which she had been carrying surreptitiously in her lap, shook herself free from the particles of earth that she had contracted, stood upright, and prepared resignedly to stroll with Sunny and hear what she had to say, in place of Lady Bell telling her own, dear, delightful, if naughty story.

"Bell," continued Mrs. Sundon, with a perceptible effort, "I said last night that there must be secrets between even the best friends. I have been thinking over the matter since, and there is one thing which I cannot bring myself to keep from you. When have you last heard of your uncle, Mr. Godwin, of St. Bevis's?"

Lady Bell stood still, staring. Was the secret—her secret, finding its way out after all, but in a roundabout, annoying fashion, of which she did not approve?

"I saw Squire Godwin when I was in

town, just before—" she broke off, changing colour, to ask quickly, "Have you heard from him? Has he been here?"

"No, child; what should bring him here?" replied Mrs. Sundon with a shiver; then she demanded peremptorily, with a little choking catch of her breath, "Tell me precisely, Bell, for pity's sake, when you saw your uncle last?"

"It was two nights before I went to visit my old nurse at Islington," replied Lady Bell wondering, but released from much personal interest in the subject; "I was four days at Islington, one additional day in London, and two more in coming down here; I declare it seems a long time in looking back, so much may happen in ten days. But it is not above ten days, by the sun, since I said good day to Mr. Godwin in Cleveland Court."

"Not more! it is too long as it is," muttered Mrs. Sundon, pressing her lips together; "of course an old story; I was gone wild to fancy for a second that the

meeting could have been later. Bell," Mrs. Sundon went on quickly, in answer to the speculation in Lady Bell's eyes, "it is painful for me to tell you the bad news which I know for a certainty; your uncle came by his death in a scuffle in a gambling-house in St. James's, within the last six days."

Lady Bell was rooted to the spot. "What an end!" she said with a gasp. "He was not good to me," she admitted plaintively, mourning for the want of the power of mourning, "but he did me a kindness on that last occasion, poor Uncle Godwin!"

"Yes, Bell, be sorry for him if you can; it is a miserable fate. But Squire Godwin was spared a greater misery," cried Mrs. Sundon, in a voice shrill with anguish, "he might have been the slayer and not the slain, as another is, and that is Gregory Sundon, my husband, by whose rapier your uncle fell."

The words had barely passed the shrinking lips, when Lady Bell was hanging on

Mrs. Sundon's neck, lavishing on her tears and kisses.

"We could not help it, Sunny; it can make no difference to us," said Lady Bell.

"No difference! Bell, Bell, it is little you know," moaned Mrs. Sundon.

"What will become of Mrs. Die and Mrs. Kitty?" said Lady Bell, after a moment's sorrowful recollection.

"They are provided for," answered Mrs. Sundon promptly, "you may rely on that. I believe even the heir of entail of what is left of the estates, will suffer them to stay on in the ruined shell of the house, which neither he nor any other man will rebuild."

"Ought I to go to them?" asked Lady Bell timidly, struggling with invincible repugnance.

"I think not," Mrs. Sundon decided for her friend; "you could do them no good, and they could do you none; where would be the use, Bell? But I am thinking of giving up my share of Summerhill, shortly," she seized the opportunity to make an un-

suspected announcement, speaking rapidly, while the meaning under her words was not plain, and her motives only partially expressed, sounded forced and inadequate.

(Her trouble was too much for her, though she could keep it under to judge for a friend.)

“I shall be sorry to put you to inconvenience, or cause you regret, just when you have come back, too,” Mrs. Sundon told Lady Bell, “but I have not been well of late. The truth is, I doubt whether we are altogether right in burying ourselves. Caro’s education will soon need to be considered. In short, my dear Lady Bell, I have made up my mind to go up to town, and take lodgings there for a time.”

Once more Lady Bell was taken aback ; she had sustained a succession of surprises.

She looked round her on the peaceful retreat where Captain Fane would picture her ; she even thought of her floral ship just planned, and the first slips of the edging set.

Lady Bell was not certain that Mrs. Sundon was acting with all the candour and consideration which Lady Bell might have expected from her friend, in thus arriving at an apparently fixed conclusion, without previous reference to and consultation with the joint householder at Summerhill.

But the poor soul was in great grief through her wretched husband.

What did it signify where Lady Bell lived while Harry Fane was absent? Nay, it was in town that she would soonest hear tidings from the seat of war of squadrons and frigates.

It was in town that Lady Bell's acquaintance with Harry Fane had had its rise, progress, and completion.

In the sequel of such a story localities are apt to be viewed in one of two lights—either places become unbearable as reminding the actor too vividly of lost joys, and are thenceforth shunned; or the same places are invested with a new and peculiarly tender interest, and are clung to because of

the very memories which this tree, or that turn of the road, is capable of arousing.

In the last case the hope of restoration is paramount ; the strong sorrow of separation is both a youthful sorrow and a recent sorrow, and is not without an indescribable charm of its own.

This was true of Lady Bell as she decided that she would like to go back to town. She would like above all things to be within hail of the Admiralty, and some of the admirals' wives, who were on her visiting list ; she would even prize being in the vicinity of the Mall of St. James's, the play-houses, the exhibitions, and the Pantheon, with the power of going to them all again.

Lady Bell heard Mrs. Sundon saying, half-eagerly, half-sorrowfully, " You may make the same arrangement with some other friends and go to them."

" Why, Sunny, what are you thinking of?" cried Lady Bell excitedly, " are you tired of me? Do you want to get rid of me, and cast me adrift on the world?"

“No, no, Bell,” denied Mrs. Sundon faintly.

“Are you not aware that town and country are the same to me? for that matter, I’ve grown so shockingly dissipated in one season that I think on the whole I shall prefer the town if you and Caro are there. Do you forget all we’ve been to each other? or are you so unjust and unkind as to imagine that horrible accident which, if I may say so, only fills me with pity and endears you to me the more, can part us?”

“I can only thank you, child,” said Mrs. Sundon.

“I have no friend one hundredth part so near and dear to whom I could go. Should I return to Miss Kingscote, do you think?” suggested Lady Bell, her lively mind taking stock of all kinds of probabilities, “when I could not abide the prospect without the solace of Master Charles’s company? Yes, indeed, Sunny, I could not have stood the dear, dull, rough old soul alone before, and

that when I had not another refuge or a crown in my pocket. If the war were over, indeed, and all the brave men engaged in it were returned"—Lady Bell paused. In spite of the shock which she had received, her eyes glittered with softest dew, her lips formed themselves into a smile of the gladdest anticipation, and for a third time the secret hung trembling on her lips.

But again Mrs. Sundon interposed and closed anew the tender bars. She was gazing at the warm, rosy light in Lady Bell's face, contrasted as it was with the chill, grey shadow on her own. She looked as if she saw the contrast. Perhaps at the moment she could not bear to have the opposite fortunes of herself and her friend shown her in detail. Mrs. Sundon was not the woman, in the state of mind, to listen to a happy love tale.

Lady Bell was young in heart, beside her friend, who was young only in years. Lady Bell did not know many things and had forgotten others. It was not meet or seemly

to bring her joy to be returned thanks for by her friend in mortal sorrow; or that the wine of life bubbling up in the one full cup should be caused to overflow into that other cup in which were rue and wormwood, and the dregs of God's wrath, wrung out.

Mrs. Sundon converted into the merest fragmentary hint the narrative which Lady Bell had such a mind to tell, by interposing, catching up and making Mrs. Sundon's own of its introductory sentences.

"When the war is over, some fortunate man, who has met his fate and whose fate has met him, will wreath his sword in myrtle and take up house with my Bell," said Mrs. Sundon gently but unsteadily. "We shall leave the particulars till he come to make them clear. Life is so full of uncertainties—no, I did not mean to frighten you, child. But if you care to stay with me still, and to put up with a poor, tried, broken woman, I promise you that I shall do the best I can for my dear Bell."

"I am pure certain you will, Sunny,"

answered Lady Bell affectionately, recovering the faster from the chagrin of having her confidence persistently rejected, because she was already recollecting, and taking shame to herself for the inopportune moment which she had chosen for offering her confidence.

Lady Bell shrank from asking Mrs. Sundon how she had learned the lamentable catastrophe ; whether from the journals or a town letter, and from going into the details—with what had become of Mr. Sundon, whether he were in hiding or had succeeded in effecting his escape. Of this Lady Bell had no doubt, that the unhappy affair would be hushed up like other broils of a similar description. It concerned too many people of position for its exposure to be sanctioned.

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE COUNTRY TO THE TOWN AGAIN.

EVENTS had so come about, that when Lady Bell walked over to Nutfield to mingle congratulations and condolences with Miss Kingscote on Master Charles's having joined the army, Lady Bell had also to tell of the contemplated departure of herself and Mrs. Sundon, a crushing coincidence to Miss Kingscote.

But Lady Bell was led to think that her going was a merciful provision, so far as concerned the keeping of her secret from a woman who could no more keep a secret than she could hold her tongue.

Lady Bell sat again in the homely parlour where she had stitched the chair-covers, and

had sought to make the lagging hours pass more quickly by playing shovel-board with Master Charles, or by benevolently contributing her finishing touches to his education, in teaching him the air of a song or the last cotillon step. That was in the days when she was poor old Squire Trevor's runaway wife.

Now Lady Bell was a wife who gloried in her hidden title, a rich woman gloating over her secret hoards. But she tried to speak and look as before. She even strove to put Miss Kingscote off any scent which, imperceptible to Mrs. Sundon, might yet hang about Lady Bell.

Lady Bell was elaborately lively and witty. She entertained Miss Kingscote with all her adventures which were public property. She was really sorry on Miss Kingscote's account that she, Lady Bell, had not been so obliging as to get into a fire or an earthquake when she was in town.

For Miss Kingscote loved the marvellous in her own or her friend's stories.

There were twins who had lived a long lifetime apart, and had yet followed the well-known law of twins, by dying within the same hour.

Somebody had known a party of resurrectionists who had been thinking of taking up a dead, and had found a living body.

An honest woman had expired from no worse disease than a whitlow.

A wild duck had been discovered sitting on a nest in an oak-tree.

People had seen a perfect rainbow at nine o'clock at night.

After these *lusus naturæ* Miss Kingscote was best pleased with pretty stories.

His Majesty had graciously interposed his august arms, to prevent the fall of a tottering old woman, who was presenting a petition in favour of her grandson, a hardened, dashing young highwayman, taken in the act, and lying under sentence of death.

Her Majesty had received the most beautiful set of sable furs ever beheld in

England, as a present from the Empress of Russia.

Lady Bell did not stint her old friend in such annals, but it was in vain.

Within half an hour of Lady Bell's entrance, Miss Kingscote had cried out that there was a difference in Lady Bell.

The subtle distinction in eye, lip and voice which had failed to attract the attention of a woman like Mrs. Sundon, or having attracted it, had not won a single comment or conjecture from Lady Bell's bosom friend in whole days of renewed intimate intercourse, was instantly patent beyond evasion to the simple woman whose leisure and unconsciousness were those of a child.

Miss Kingscote did not hesitate to put her clumsy hand on the alteration, and, in other circumstances, the rude but natural process might have had a fascination for Lady Bell. She might have sought to make up to herself for the lurking mortification of getting off so easily at home, from Mrs. Sundon's delicacy or indifference, by

going again and again to Nutfield to be covered with confusion, and brought to the brink of detection by Miss Kingscote. For Lady Bell's second secret was a happy secret.

But there were two objections to the dangerous indulgence. Lady Bell was going away, and Miss Kingscote had an incurable propensity to tell a discovery all round.

“La ! Lady Bell,” Miss Kingscote cried that first day, “what do have come to you ? When you ain’t speaking, you sit with your lips a-smiling and your eyes staring at the wall as if you saw a flea a-sticking in it, and the sight were rare fine and main welcome to you. When wenches let their minds slip away like that, we all can guess what they slip to. These be fine Lon’on manners, to gabble like a dabchick for five minutes, and for the next not to speak a word. Yet I’ll go bail I’ve been telling you every article in Master Charles’s kit, and asking your mind on each. And there you sit a-

smiling at me for all the world like a poor soul as has lost her mind."

"I've found it again then, Miss Kingscote," said Lady Bell, hastening to atone for her offence. "Master Charles took away a wrap-rascal with him, you said?"

"I never said he did aught of the kind. He took away the good frieze coat of his father afore him. Why, the less we have of grand Lon'on manners the better, say I—you take me? I'm cracking my joke, my dear. Nay, we could not hope to keep two such fine birds as you and Madam Sundon long among us. Only it do come hard that you should take your flight amongst with my Master Charles—the Lord bring him back from the wars safe and sound!"

"Amen to that prayer for all gallant men serving their country," Lady Bell chimed in sedately, and softly, clasping her hands on her knees.

"I'll warrant you have an interest in that response, my Lady Bell, else you would have been none so quick in making it so

prettily," said Miss Kingscote. "There! now, you've gone as red as the red July flower, which I was wont to compare you to when you lived with me and Master Charles, and we didn't know you was quality; those were happy days."

"That they were, Miss Kingscote," acknowledged kind little Lady Bell, very kind when you took her in the right way, and growing kinder now than ever.

"And how am I to face the next winter, with you all clean gone, and nought to dream on but bloody battles in the Back Woods with them Red Injins?" Miss Kingscote bemoaned herself dismally.

"But the Indians are on Master Charles's side," Lady Bell said cheerfully.

Miss Kingscote dismissed the suggestion with scorn. "Don't go to tell me that. I'll have nought to divert me but spying winding-sheets in them candles."

"At least I should not begin to think of the winter before the summer is here," Lady Bell recommended as good philosophy;

“you know Master Charles has to be trained to be a soldier in one of the barracks near town, where we shall be able to see a great deal of him. Who knows but the war may end sooner than his training?”

“If you had but stayed with us a bit longer yourself,” regretted Miss Kingscote; “a wedding-ring leapt out of the fire right into my lap last night.”

“Good gracious! then you must be going to be married yourself, my dear Miss Kingscote, so that you need not mind who goes,” vowed Lady Bell, like the naughty puss she was at that moment.

“Ne’er a one of I, since I have given up all thoughts of marrying, leastways till I’m sought, for I’ll make no rash promises. As for Master Charles, he’s going a-campaigning—the worst luck to the lasses!—afore he goes a-courting. The ring mun have been yours, Lady Bell, I see it in your face; I know the face of a young woman as has marriage in her eye.”

“You are wrong, you are wrong,” in-

sisted Lady Bell, laughing in an ecstasy of mischievous delight, "I'll wager you a silk gown, Miss Kingscote, that I'll never marry again."

"It is easy to say 'done,'" declared Miss Kingscote, opening her goggle eyes, "but you can't ever mean it; no, if you had abode still, we might have had the wedding at Summerhill, and that would have given us a fillip, and been a rare diversion. I would have had a hop at it myself, to set it off, because you are a favourite. I would have given you such a jig as would have shaken the boards."

"I am obliged to you all the same, Miss Kingscote," said Lady Bell, making the tub curtsey which she had made at her first drawing-room. "I would do anything in life to please you; indeed I would, an' I could; but the thing is clean impossible."

"You are making fun of me, that's what you're doing, Lady Bell," Miss Kingscote came to the bright conclusion; "but I would have been even with you if you had abode

still, for there is a fellow in the maze—never go for to tell me there's none, with that red in your cheek and that light in your eye; and you come to bid farewell to Nutfield, a-carrying a heart aneath your gownd. But I was sure and certain whenever one of you madams set your noses to the smoke of Lon'on, you would ne'er rest till you had both harked back to the town."

The London smoke of which Miss Kingscote spoke, and which had smelt sweet to Lady Bell, had not begun to soil the fresh spring green of the parks and public gardens, when Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon were gone, bag and baggage, from Summerhill.

The ladies were established in genteel lodgings in the Haymarket. The situation was central, and full of the bustle which was then thought desirable in a town lodging. The rooms in themselves were somewhat faded and dingy, after those of Summerhill, but the young women who

occupied them were sufficient to brighten and adorn most rooms.

In the inconsistency which had lately become visible in Mrs. Sundon's character, in spite of the stress which had been laid on the coming requirements of Miss Caro's juvenile education, the child was left behind after all.

Caro, who was being reared so wisely and so carefully; who, under the very restrictions which her mother imposed, had occupied so much of Mrs. Sundon's thoughts; the woman child, in whom was centred her mother's chief hopes and expectations—was disposed of apart from that mother!

Caro was intrusted confidently to Miss Kingscote, that the child might run wild under that good woman's perfectly kindly, but not over-discreet superintendence. Caro was, in her small person, to fill the vacant places—to lighten the dullness of Nutfield.

Caro's beautiful, stately young mother was to resume without encumbrance her place in the gay world, and take again,

freely, her share in its pomps and pleasures, undeterred by the last terrible misfortune which had befallen the miserable man she had loved, who was still her husband, and Caro's father !

Even Lady Bell, unsuspecting and pre-engrossed, was perplexed, and almost pained, by the leaving out of Caro from her mother's train.

CHAPTER IV.

MASTER CHARLES SEEING THE LIONS, AND
LADY BELL PLAYING BO-PEEP WITH THE
PUBLIC.

MASTER CHARLES had thought, when he was quitting Nutfield, that his martial education would be enthralling, and that any time which he could spare from it would be improvingly and delightfully spent in the sights and the life of the town. He had believed that to renew and maintain his brotherly intimacy with Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell would be a point of honour, and a sacrifice to friendship.

Master Charles knew better after he had been a week in the awkward squad, and a hermit in a town lodging. He racked his

back, strained his arms and legs, and caught a crick in his neck on parade. He was horribly liable to doze, and be for ever disgraced on sentry.

He promenaded the busy streets, and grew weary of the exercise.

He delivered with an important face letters of introduction, which were but carelessly received. He was made to comprehend that while he was not a fellow of much account, even where his few rescued ancestral acres lay, except for the honest, friendly hands which had been stretched forth to hold him up and help him forward, he was absolutely nobody in mighty London.

No club hospitality of White's or Boodle's was extended to him. He might sit night after night at the play, or tickling his ears at the opera, but it must be without a comrade.

His very brother officers were strangers to him, like the rest of the world, and were also somewhat slow to recognise the merits

which were so slenderly gilded by fortune.

Of course, that was particularly the case with the rough diamonds and overgrown school-boys of his mess, when, before they had become acquainted with those qualities in their last sub which they could heartily appreciate, they found in him a mind and will of his own, in what they regarded as reprehensible punctilios.

He might saunter, and sit, and regale himself in the parks and public gardens, now open for the season, and feel all the time, in the middle of the cultivated surroundings and the animated crowds, like a pelican in the wilderness.

He might even be so lucky as to get a card for a private assembly; he might dress carefully in the linen and lace which had been his sister Deb's pride, and in the uniform that not a month ago he had held so splendid; he might try conscientiously to call to mind the lessons which he had got gratis, from two such authorities

as Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon in town breeding.

What was his reward? A curtesy from his hostess; two fingers from his host; some chicken-bones and negus, if he chose to fight for them, late in the evening. But not an introduction which he cared for; not an opportunity worth having to practise his dancing, and show his gallantry, before he went off, tired and sulky, to spend money which he could ill spare on a coach or a chair to his barracks or his lodging.

He could have pummelled a few feather heads, or trounced a few unconscionable dandies, with satisfaction, by way of variety. For this young gentleman was not of a sad and severe temper naturally. He was frank and free, bold and brave; one of the best riders after the hounds, and most untiring dancer of "Tit for Tat" and "Jack-on-the-Green" within cry of his native Lumley.

There were places to which Master Charles would have been moderately welcome as a poor young country pigeon, that

had yet some feathers of which he might be plucked. But then he had passed his word to a lady that he would not bet or play cards unless in the tamest fashion.

If he were fit for nothing else, he was fit to keep his word—to the salvation of his worldly estate, his independence, his prospects in life, and what was infinitely more—of his honour and honesty in the sight of God and man. People might call him milk-sop or Methodist, or what they chose; he had passed his word, and he would keep it, like the sprig of the stock which had developed in its day many a gallant, indomitable Puritan.

Master Charles very soon opened his eyes to the advantage (in which lay a key to the position) of being on intimate terms with two of the prettiest, wittiest young women of rank and fashion in London.

He would not have slighted Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell had they been neither pretty nor witty, and had their claims to rank and fashion failed on being put to the test; for

it was true—what Mrs. Sundon had once said of Master Charles—that he was honourable above his brethren. But what was generous in his manliness did not rob him of the acuteness which could see and seize an advantage.

It is not to say, moreover, that Master Charles's motives were wholly or even chiefly self-interested, because it was a great gain to him that these rooms in the Haymarket were open to him at any hour of the day, and he could go there not only for a cup of tea, but for breakfast, dinner, or supper, as it suited him, when he was off duty.

He could do, and rejoice to do, something for his friends again. He could be of almost as great use to the ladies in the town as in the country. Unquestionably, in the former they had squires at command, but that did not argue that they could dispense with the manly, kindly young fellow on whom they could implicitly rely, and who never presumed on his services.

Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell were as glad to see Master Charles in town as he was to see them, though the preponderance of the gain might be on his side. He remarked with pride that change of place wrought no change in their regard. The ladies remained faithful to the league entered into when they were rustivating as country belles and Ladies Bountiful in the depths of the country.

Master Charles made himself at home with the mistresses of the lodging in the Haymarket in all simplicity, as he and his sister had given Lady Bell Trevor and Mrs. Sundon a home at Nutfield.

Mrs. Sundon took a good woman's interest in Master Charles. She had rescued him from perilous ways, and that alone constituted him her *protégé*, though in age he was a year and a half her senior, as he was rather fond of reminding her.

She was well disposed to continue the guardianship which he could afford her, and which she could repay a hundred-fold; for she could give him the priceless benefit, not

of her experience alone, but of her purity and integrity, in threading his way among the snares and pitfalls which the town placed in the path of a young country gentleman uninitiated in its base craft, and liable to be abashed by its impudence.

Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell could enable Master Charles, by accepting their gentle companionship, to make in safety and triumph an honest acquaintance with town life, without stumbling and tumbling into vice and ruin.

Lady Bell vied with Mrs. Sundon in conferring the womanly obligation, and in seeking worthily to entertain and cicerone Master Charles.

The truth was, that Lady Bell had felt it a little awkward to return to the gay world which she had so recently forsaken, while bound by a tie of which that world knew nothing.

She had supposed that she would pass the period of Harry Fane's absence in retirement at Summerhill. It was to be otherwise,

and she did not know how she was to meet her hosts of admirers without showing some consciousness, and betraying a change.

She did not consider that if she succeeded in appearing as she was before, she would be acting a false part, and imposing a cheat on the public. She was the most innocent and ignorant of clandestine wives, yet she had a dim, vague notion that it would not be nice for those men—Sir George Waring, Lord Boscobel, and others—to press round her as when she was free.

Nay, she felt that she would be fit to die with shame and remorse if the men were seriously misled, and supposing she could not parry what had been already laid at her feet during the winter—offers, offers of marriage, from deceived, mocked men to a married woman, who exulted in her marriage, though she let it be unproclaimed.

One means of escape from the difficulty Lady Bell had not anticipated, and it proved a little trying to her girlish vanity.

In that short interval since she had abdi-

cated her power as a belle and toast, she had been just a little forgotten. Other claimants to her crown had appeared, and been so far acknowledged.

There were conspicuous defaulters from the ranks of Lady Bell's former sworn admirers, the most flagrant being Sir George Waring, and with him his familiar spirit, Mrs. Lascelles.

Some said that Sir George, whose good nature did not exempt him from the prevailing infirmity of spleen—or a tolerably vigorous and stubborn spite, had not forgotten an affront which Lady Bell had been so indiscreet as to administer to him on the night of the masquerade ball at White's.

Sir George himself, with his toadies and imitators, begged to explain that his defection was provoked by the discovery that Lady Bell Trevor was a little humbug. She had pretended to withdraw voluntarily from the town's homage into the shade, and here was she turning up again to solicit public

patronage before "summer had set in with its usual severity."

Besides, Lady Bell lost in certain quarters by her association with Mrs. Sundon. These lax, yet bitter judges, knew Mrs. Sundon as a fine woman, who was too good for her neighbours.

Had not Mrs. Sundon first insisted on marrying and whitewashing poor Sundon of Chevely, and then been hard on the sinner and left him in the lurch; till worse—faugh! mention it not to ears polite!—something like murder, came of it.

If the judges wanted wifely virtue in such circumstances, it was virtue after the model of Mrs. Beverley's in the *Gamester*. Virtue in a woman ought on no account to be guilty of turning round upon, upbraiding, departing from a man, not though he were self-indulgent, forsworn, craven, and cruel; though he had lied to her, stolen from her, well-nigh destroyed her.

There were whispers, too, early current in influential circles, of country cousins

who could establish claims upon, and clog the heels of the dainty beauty, Lady Bell Trevor. A privileged train of detrimental was not a desirable appendage to a young lady

One odd, authoritative fellow had appeared on the night of the masquerade. Here was another (if, indeed, it were not one and the same bumpkin) in the raw ensign, of whom nobody knew a syllable, except that he was promoted to be the constant attendant on Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon at public places.

But Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell did not hear the malicious small talk of the highest society.

Beyond a twinge, not unwholesome, of mortification at finding herself not so much valued as she had imagined, Lady Bell did not take to heart her losses in "sublime" beaux. She was positively relieved by the defection of a portion of her servants, and she had still more than she knew what to do with.

At first she was incomprehensibly shy and nervous to her admirers; then—growing hardened, alas!—she began to find that it was rather amusing and exciting to play with and baffle her followers.

Lady Bell's confession to Mrs. Sundon had died on Lady Bell's lips, till half in sensitiveness, half in pride, and partly in the thoughtless obtuseness of what had become custom, she was reconciled to Mrs. Sundon remaining in the dark by her own choice, with regard to an event of the importance of which Lady Bell's friend could not have the smallest conception beforehand.

Lady Bell grew at her ease—cool, careless with her society, while they could not for their lives tell why the young widow, Lady Bell Trevor, should appropriate an immunity not granted to and seldom taken by single women.

Mrs. Sundon looked on, but did not seem to see; or, doing as she wished to be done by, would not interfere with Lady Bell's pranks, which were really committed

in the exuberance of satisfaction, and in girlish roguishness.

But Lady Bell got daring in provoking and defying juries of chaperons and courts of men. She would offer to play *ecarté* with this man, or to make up a couple wanting in a country dance with that. She would employ Mr. Gower or Sir Thomas Neville to bring her shawl, and reward him with a pinch of snuff out of her own particular little enamel snuff-box. What were these men to her? or what could she ever be to them. Why should she be mincing and scrupulous like a mere girl?

All the time Lady Bell clung to Master Charles as to an old friend, and brotherly ally, who would come to her aid, back her, cover her retreat at any moment.

Lady Bell won the name of being a terrible flirt, and that honest, neighbourly, brotherly friendship, which was fully recognised down at Summerhill, was exactly the relation which the suspicious, sneering, vitiated gay world could not understand.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER WATER-PARTY, AND A STRANGE ENCOUNTER AT THE DOCKS.

MRS. SUNDON, Lady Bell, and Master Charles went often to Ranelagh and Vauxhall, where their presence became as conspicuous as, and rather more attractive than, that of the gigantic Russian Count Orloff, who was yet to put his size and strength to use in strangling his Czar, Peter III.

Master Charles was shown these places in their spring perfection, while he was subjected to a little of the envy for superior advantages which he had vented on others, but which men don't object to receive in their own persons. He was too modest to

swagger, but he did hold up his head, with his chin somewhat in the air, as he made the circle of the Rotunda, or hurried along quite willing to be surprised and enchanted by the cascade, with two such ladies hanging familiarly on each arm.

To Lady Bell's great regret, Mrs. Sidons had completed her engagement for the season, and was gone on a professional tour.

Yet Lady Bell was heard to reflect, with a deep sigh, "It was so heavenly the last time I heard her, that I do not know how I could have stood her falling off, which must have been."

In correspondence with this pensive sentiment, Lady Bell argued, rather ungratefully, that Sir Joshua did not show "near such fine pictures," nor "t'other man such fine plates" (witness her treasured piece of Wedgwood ware), as she had seen on a former occasion.

However, when Lady Bell made up a water-party to Kew, she admitted that it

was far more harmonious and decorous than that which she had arranged with Lady Sundon and Mrs. Lascelles to Hampton. Lady Bell could never lift up her hands and eyes high enough, or condemn too severely the folly into which she had been entangled at Hampton.

“To think that a gentleman who was present had to tell us that we should be exposed to something disagreeable, which was just what happened. No, I shall never cease to be shocked at the impropriety of singing with Sir George Waring on the water in the afternoon,” said Lady Bell, when sitting again in a barge.

She spoke as solemnly as if her conduct before and after that event had been highly exemplary—the pink of prudence—and as if she were delivering a sermon pointed with the moral of her own transgressions to the blessed baby, Master Charles.

“It must have been monstrous cold for you to go on the water like this in February,” remarked the unimpressed gentle-

man: "I wonder how you ever came to think of it."

"Master Charles, it was the loveliest day," corrected Lady Bell, with a relapse into enthusiasm. "I had the charmingest weather all winter. I can't believe that it had been winter, or if so, winter must have borrowed the very finest days from summer."

"That is mighty queer, ain't it, Mrs. Sundon?" appealed Master Charles; "we didn't know the past winter different from the rest of the winters in our lives. It was as miry and mucky as ever down at Nutfield and Summerhill."

"It was not that here," Lady Bell said decidedly. "You and Sunny make the grossest mistake when you maintain that the parks and gardens, and lawns and meadows, such as these, must look far better all rustling with green, and red and white with roses and lilies, than when I saw them last. You are quite wrong. I fancy the buds must be more to some people than the

blossoms, and the first green shoots of the lilac to such full purple clusters as you have yonder," pointing to an overhanging bush.

"Not many people will agree with you in such a whim, Bell," Mrs. Sundon joined in the conversation, lifting up her head from leaning it on her hand.

"I cannot help it," replied the unshaken Lady Bell. "The Mall of St. James's will never look half so well as it looked under the bare boughs against the grey sky. I was walking there yesterday, and I thought the trees were scrubby and dusty, that they had suffered an eclipse like Sir Joshua's pictures and Mr. Wedgwood's ware. No, Master Charles, it was not monstrous cold—I never felt cold, and everything was monstrous pretty then."

"Why, Lady Bell, you must have been bewitched," Master Charles accused her.

"Perhaps I was," she laughed, with tender tears in her laughter, "and I should like nothing better than to be so bewitched

again. Oh ! when will the months roll on till foggy November brings bleak February ? —I am weary of the slow march of time.”

“I’ll have got my marching orders for another sort of marching before then,” Master Charles told her soberly ; “will that help you, Lady Bell ? It seems to me you have quarrelled with the present company.”

“How can you say so, sir, when you and Sunny are here ?” Lady Bell flung back the accusation indignantly. “You must be the next thing to the best company, if you are not the very best, which you can no more help, than I can help being silly. No, your marching away will not do any good, unless you would all march away, and march back again, in double quick time, merrily.”

In this pursuit of pleasure Master Charles and Lady Bell could not be expected to be very discreet. Master Charles indeed knew little or nothing of places and circles except what his companions and his instinct told him. As for Lady Bell, she had taken a

reckless fit, and was tempted to trample on conventionalities. But even Mrs. Sundon exercised scant discrimination, and put in few vetos.

The trio were to be met wherever the public congregated, and there was any spectacle to be beheld, without being over-scrupulous as to the style of the public, or the nature of the spectacle. It might be Blanchard's balloon, or a mermaid that was to be inspected. The resort might be Portland Chapel, or a ridotto.

Mrs. Sundon, though she never played herself, would watch players. She would sit for an hour at a time like a statue, by a faro-table.

"Poor soul, what wrought her husband's undoing, and has made a waste of her own womanhood, is invested with a morbid fascination for her," Master Charles and Lady Bell said to each other, with saddened faces trying to draw their friend away without success.

"Let me be," she dismissed the couple

authoritatively, "I'm an old stager here to you two, though I wear mighty well. Go about the rooms, and enjoy yourselves, never mind me. I prefer to sit still, croaking like a raven."

Lady Bell had only received one letter from her husband, and that was from no farther off than Portsmouth, written just before he sailed.

Captain Fane warned Lady Bell that both French and American ships had been seen in the Channel; not that she was to have any fear for him, since she had armed him and sent him forth to victory. But he mentioned the presence of the double enemy to prepare her for a probable contingency. The *Thunderbomb* might have to give chase, or to be given chase to, and thus be drawn out of her course, so that it might be impossible for Lady Bell to hear from him again, about the time he had told her.

Lady Bell had not heard again, but the interval was too short, and she was too much built up in her late-found love and

happiness to be troubled with apprehension. Still she longed for news.

She commenced to prick her ears, and gather with avidity every rumour circulated either in society or in the newspapers, of what homeward-bound ships had come into harbour, of what outward-bound ships had been spoken, of what land engagements had taken place, of where Paul Jones was last heard of.

Master Charles catered for Lady Bell in this respect; naturally he was full of the movements of the two warlike brothers Howe—the Admiral and the General appointed to the same expedition of taking Long and Staten islands—and rejoiced over the repulse of the rebels at the Three Rivers.

But Lady Bell was appalled at the mention of the corps passing through Hell-gate in order to fight the skirmish of the White Plains.

And she hailed the arrival of Sir Peter Parker's fleet off Cape Fear. She gloried

with trembling over the action at Cape Sullivan and the story of the *Bristol*, the cable of which had been cut with the shot, so that she had lain “raked” by the enemy’s fire, when Captain Morris had stood wounded till his arm was blown off, and at one time the Commodore had been left alone on the quarter-deck—“a spectacle of intrepidity.”

She did not recoil so much from the disastrous information that an English transport with troops had sailed right into Boston harbour, not knowing that it had been evacuated by the British, when the first detachments were made prisoners without the chance of striking a blow.

“If that were to happen again,” Lady Bell said to herself, following a train of thought, “I should sail by the very next ship to go into prison with him, console him and be happy.”

One morning, in her careful study of the *St. James’s Chronicle*, Lady Bell read that an ordinary merchant ship, the *Sweet*

Sue, trading to the West Indies, cargo, sugar and rum, had arrived at her wharf, near London Bridge, having overcome the perils of her voyage.

The *Sweet Sue* had encountered, and been in communication with, several of his Majesty's ships, having had to tack and beat about for a week at a time in different latitudes.

Excited by this statement, vague as it was, Lady Bell took a resolution. She would procure a fly, drive away by herself to the office of the shipowners whose address the newspaper gave, and as a simple stranger with an interest in the navy, would make personal inquiries if any of the vessels which had passed and overhauled the *Sweet Sue* was his Majesty's frigate, *Thunderbomb*, Commander, Harry Fane.

She would not trust the commission to Master Charles, or to any one save herself. How could she give such a commission without entering into an explanation? and

this was not the time for an explanation. Besides, who would care to sift every word of the answer, and cross-question and extract further information as Lady Bell would? She knew nothing of wharves or docks, but that was all the better for her purpose, since she desired privacy.

Lady Bell had no difficulty in excusing herself from bestowing her company on Mrs. Sundon that afternoon, and luckily it was a day when Master Charles was on duty.

Lady Bell set out in her fly, and did an ostensible errand of shopping, and then with a beating heart gave her driver his direction. Under his guidance, her vehicle was soon jammed into a double row of loaded and empty waggons, drays, strings of work-horses travelling backwards and forwards, rattling and lumbering, getting hopelessly locked, and struggling in the agonies of extrication in the narrow thoroughfares. Lady Bell and her equipage, though it was but a fly, presented

an incongruous appearance among the other vehicles, and the general company, which consisted of warehousemen, carters and porters, seafaring men—native and foreign, bargemen, and their lodging-house keepers, poor soldiers' and sailors' wives, low hucksters, clamorous sellers of fish from Billingsgate, with the uncouth and hideous nondescripts that put the finishing touches to such crowds.

Amidst the huge waggons and the grinding drags, Lady Bell's fly looked a fly indeed. Lady Bell herself showed as much out of place, contrasted with the homely, sordid figures in filthy smocks and jackets, ragged gowns and torn caps, as if she had come down from the moon.

Lady Bell was in her plainest, darkest gauze gown, but that was lightened by a great point-lace collar, open at the throat for heat, coming down in front to the short waist, where it was fastened by a knot of white riband. Her arms, in their long grey gloves, were crossed before her to

keep her hands still. Her large flapping hat served her for a shade.

But though Lady Bell was stared at, and even openly remarked upon occasionally, her progress was not impeded. For it did happen that fine gentlemen—ay, and fine ladies—found their way sometimes into these quarters; and whether they came for good or for evil, they came, it was understood, with sufficient power to protect themselves in broad day.

The sunshine was pouring down without shrinking or shame on such sights, sounds, and smells as Lady Bell could not have imagined.

Lady Bell was rational and humane for her years and opportunities. Looking out on these haggard and careladen, as well as brutalised, distorted faces, even in the midst of her own engrossing concerns, her gentle pity quite as much as her loathing horror was stirred; and “Oh that Harry and I could do something in the future to help our poor fellow-creatures!” was

passing through the young wife's mind. "Harry has thought and feeling to spare, hates frittering, hardening luxury and frivolity, is fond of dwelling on the good deeds of Captain Coram and such public benefactors. Harry means that we shall be reverent and tender folks, and it will be a fit thank-offering for our reunion when it comes."

Lady Bell kept looking out eagerly for the office which she was in search of, among places of a similar description, where sailing-vessels were to be heard of, and where intending passengers came for information, or to take out their berths, among great stores and sheds extending to the quays. At last she saw the name, and causing her conveyance to be drawn up close to the door, she alighted, and walked in through the dark passage to the clerk's room.

It was past the busiest hours of the day, and there was only one shabby, middle-aged man sitting at a desk. He looked

up, and stared hard at the solitary state of Lady Bell's youth and quality; then leapt to the very same shrewd conclusion which Mrs. Siddons had arrived at long before—a young lady in fault, and the devil to pay. Here was a wheel within a wheel, which he might work to his own ends.

Not being by any means an honourable specimen of the genus elderly shipping clerk, he thought less of sparing the young lady than of himself profiting by her errors. He hesitated whether, under the circumstances, he should be rough or obsequious, give Lady Bell false or correct information, forcibly detain her, taking the law into his own hands till he sought to communicate with her friends, or ostentatiously connive at her misdemeanours.

In the end, Lady Bell's self-command and self-assertion, qualities simply due to the great institution of her class, in saying what she wanted, carried the day, and induced her informant to take the latter

and easier course. He bowed and becked before Lady Bell.

He told her quickly all that the captain of the *Sweet Sue* knew of the ships of war which had signalled her, in which, to Lady Bell's deep disappointment, there was not a single mention of the *Thunderbomb* or of Captain Fane, not even any scrap or clue which loving ingenuity could twist into a connection with that noble vessel and gallant commander. There was nothing for it but that Lady Bell should make the best of a misspent afternoon, tender a reward to the glib mouthpiece of the *Sweet Sue*, return to her fly, and get out of the foreign region as fast as possible.

Something caught Lady Bell's eye, however, as she was ushered out, and stood for an instant in the doorway. She was not so entirely overcome as to fail to remark that she was not singular in the light of a visitor from the upper ten thousand to the docks. While she had been in the office, an aristocratic chair had been set

down directly opposite by its bearers, with whose faces Lady Bell seemed to feel strangely familiar. The chair stood within the arch of a shed, over which was printed, "Inquire within for the Dover and Deal boats."

As Lady Bell put her foot on the step of the fly, eager to escape from a dangerous contiguity, the chairmen lifted the chair and carried it past, vouchsafing Lady Bell a glimpse of a face and a figure which kept her arrested on the step.

The face was looking another way, but there was no mistaking the profile behind the black-lace square, or the air of the figure in the mode mantle. There was Mrs. Sundon as sure as here was Lady Bell. These were the chairmen whom Mrs. Sundon was in the habit of employing when she used a chair. No wonder Lady Bell's first glance had struck her with their well-known features.

What Mrs. Sundon was doing at the docks and the shed with "Inquire within

for the Dover and Deal Boats ;” whether she had been following in the track of Lady Bell, at whom she had not even looked ; or whether it was an astounding coincidence—Lady Bell could not tell, and durst not ask ; but she was as certain of Sunny’s identity as of her own.

“ What were you doing with yourself this afternoon, Sunny ?” Lady Bell did falter, when both had got home safely and separately to the Haymarket.

“ What was I doing with myself, Bell ?” Mrs. Sundon repeated languidly ; “ I was out seeking to ascertain some useful particulars with regard to an old servant.”

It might have been so. It was not in Lady Bell’s power to pursue the investigation.

CHAPTER VI.

DANCING THE BOLERO.

THE curious encounter of the friends had slipped into the background of Lady Bell's memory when she and Mrs. Sundon, attended by Master Charles, went to Vauxhall next evening. They were to be in time for the fag-end of a large regatta, a new importation from Venetian canals to the Thames. The regatta was to be witnessed by their Graces of Cumberland and Gloucester, with a great influx of fine company in their train, making Vauxhall for the occasion take the *pas* from Ranelagh.

Theré were showery clouds in the blue sky, but these only served to freshen the

gardens, and to offer opportunities for more races than those on the water, races from the water—coming in sudden, pelting down-pours—to the shelter at hand in the grand special pavilion, the rotunda, and every kiosk and summer-house. And there was always the hope that the inconstant, swiftly-changing weather would become fine ere the sunset, and permit the lamp-lit trees and the fireworks to twinkle and blaze without drawback.

Lady Bell had forgotten her late expedition and its failure. With her healthy nerves and her grand capacity for enjoyment, she was in full career of pleasure.

She had relished the spectacle of the long lines of ornamental barges and gaily-dressed rowers, pulling with might and main between the ranks of moored barges, some of them bearing royal arms and containing royal liveries, all of them crowded with resplendent holiday freights.

She had said to herself, rolling the private consideration as a sweet morsel

under her tongue, that she had an express and peculiar title to regard the show with interest and enthusiasm. Her Harry Fane belonged to the water, only it was to the great open blue sea, as these bargemen belonged to the river. It was as a sailor's wife that she felt a proud property, next to that of the bargemen's wives, in the rowers' pluck and skill.

Lady Bell was amused and pleased by Master Charles's honest, unsophisticated admiration, his protestations that the regatta did not come far behind a fox-hunt, and that he should like to be trained to row as well as to fence.

Lady Bell and Master Charles laid a very innocent wager of a dish of cherries against a dish of strawberries as to which boat would win. Lady Bell's boat won, which she said was due to the rowers acknowledging in her a fit umpire ; and she crowed over the small triumph and the smaller piece of conceit.

Lady Bell and Master Charles did not

find amiss the scampering to get out of the rain, which they did half-a-dozen times before supper.

Lady Bell hoped that Sunny was also enjoying Vauxhall in her own fashion. But there was no doubt, though it might sound paradoxical, that, since Mrs. Sundon had returned to the world and gone into society, she had become unsocial and reserved in her enjoyment. Even to-night, Mrs. Sundon was falling behind and straying apart, and the practice struck Lady Bell both as looking odd, and as not being quite safe in such a public place.

At last Mrs. Sundon told Master Charles to take Lady Bell to the rotunda, for she, Mrs. Sundon, was going to join a walking-party, some of the members of which she knew, outside; but she would not keep Lady Bell and Master Charles from the music and dancing. Mrs. Sundon would come and meet her party in the third alcove to the right, in time for the fireworks.

Lady Bell began to look thoughtful and anxious. "Oh, dear!" said she in strict confidence to Master Charles; "I hope my Sunny's misfortunes are not telling upon her, so that her poor head is touched and going. It sounds vastly impertinent in me to say it, for she has always been ever so much braver and wiser than I; but she has changed, grown whimsical, does unaccountable things since we came to town; not a doubt of it."

"I suppose we do no unaccountable things, madam," Master Charles rallied Lady Bell, seeking to reassure her and himself. "The change is not at all in ourselves. We cannot accuse the town of working wonders on us."

Lady Bell glanced quickly at him. If the town were thus sharpening his country wit, so that he could turn the accusation upon herself, there might, indeed, be no end to its transformations.

The two had been standing in the ring watching the dancers. These consisted no

longer, on ordinary nights, of the cream of the guests where ladies were concerned. They did not care to dance in the mixed sets at Vauxhall or Ranelagh, unless where a large private party formed sets of their own, or when a great lady indulged in a passing frolic.

But the regatta nights were exceptional, like the nights of the club balls, which were still given in summer at Vauxhall or Ranelagh. In the Pavilion, which was reserved for the royal dukes and their circles, the example of dancing had been set. It was not followed by Lady Bell, though she saw several of her acquaintances break through their rules, and stand up in a minuet or a cotillon. Master Charles begged that she would put him through his paces, and see how much he had improved by the last lessons which he had been receiving from a professor of the art since he came to town, without tempting his companion in the least.

But a bolero was called for, and when

the band struck up the appropriate air, the caller for the dance found his courage or that of his partner fail, and the floor remained empty.

A bolero was an altogether different dance from a minuet, and a far greater novelty. The spectators, to whom fine dancing was then a fine sight, expressed their chagrin that no bolero was to be performed.

A competent judge of the Spanish bolero pronounced in that day that "it should only be danced by married women." In a light-hearted impulse, born of a sense of unbounded personal security, and of a secret spring of confidence and delight, which had been beguiling her into many follies lately, Lady Bell agreed with Master Charles that they should supply the deficiency in the company—the two would dance a bolero for the public edification and satisfaction.

A bolero at Vauxhall was sure to create a sensation. A bolero danced by Master

Charles and Lady Bell deserved to be chronicled for its own merits.

Master Charles's fresh comeliness had lately received the magical finishing touch which converted him from a countrified young gentleman to a fine young fellow, a man of the world, but without the traces of youthful dissipation and degeneracy which so often marred the class.

In his red coat and gold-fringed sash, wearing his own curly brown hair, brought into a certain dignified order by the help of powder and a riband, with his white silk stockings, shoes, and buckles, and his gold-laced hat in his hand, Master Charles looked as handsome an honest lad as ever trod the boards of Vauxhall.

For Lady Bell, she has been described often enough ; but this night, the refined charms which had made her one of the belles and toasts of the town the previous winter, were set off by the peculiar elegance of her dress.

Lady Bell wore a white muslin gown,

with a broad blue sash—the only thing that was not delicate gossamer in her dress—loosely confining, as it would have confined a child's waist, Lady Bell's clipsome waist. A muslin neckerchief, screening and shading her white neck and shoulders, was worn under the low body of the gown with a light, broad frill falling to the waist. Even the chip-hat which she wore in full dress at Vauxhall, had a wide muslin border under its brim, floating round and softening her laughing face.

So pretty were the pair, so genteel and well-matched were their figures, with such spirit and taste did Lady Bell especially dance the bolero, that rounds of vociferous applause accompanied the performance, and when it was over, once more for a moment tongues “wagged all” in Lady Bell's praise.

“By the powers! I could go in for Lady Bell yet, sir, if I had your chance,” swore an impressible man to another.

“*Mon cher*, no,” objected his companion,

more supremely selfish, cursed with a more vindictively retentive memory, and in his blandness occupying himself with adding a sting to the universal flattery. "The widow has got far too skittish for a slow dog like me. You need not laugh. I have observed her romping all the evening with this last country cousin. To be sure, that ain't much, when she and her immaculate friend, Mrs. Sundon, have been seen with him literally everywhere for the last month. No, thank you, Gower. Let her country friends keep Lady Bell if they can."

"Ah!" the last speaker suddenly shrieked like a woman. "What does that rude fellow mean by tearing past us, and treading on my toes? I have a prejudice against having my toes trodden upon, even in a mob; but if he desires to provoke me into sending you for his card, with a promise of calling for him next day, he shan't be gratified, in return for his impudence."

“I don’t think any offence was intended, Sir George. The gentleman did not see us,” represented the more placable Gower.

“Let the offence lie down among the dead men, then, with the other fricasseries which will soon put Vauxhall and Ranelagh beyond the pale of polite people,” granted Sir George indifferently, having nursed his toes into convalescence, and recovered his boasted equanimity. “I say, Nat, I am tired of staring and being stared at. Let us have a game of ombre, if you will not lay five guineas yon fellow did not mean to jostle me; but I am afraid he is too far off by this time to have the dispute properly settled, without more trouble than it is worth.”

There is a chill creeping sensation, a result of the weather, or of the state of the body, and the nerves, which sometimes comes over men and women in the middle of light, laughter, and the best of company. Superstition has given the sensation voice and words varying according to the race

and generation. But the differing interpretations, whether serious or mocking, coincide in bearing reference to an evil eye, an enemy, or a grave. A hostile influence, however superficial, transitory, and purely material, is recognised even in the lightest turning aside of the sensation, and of the effect which it produces on the mind.

Lady Bell experienced the feeling at the very moment when she had stopped dancing the bolero. In addition to the feeling there occurred to her the most extraordinary hallucination.

As Lady Bell raised her eyes to the closely-packed circle of admiring faces round her and Master Charles, there swam before her, for a second, Harry Fane's marked face, not as she had seen it last, subdued with tenderness, but stern with displeasure, and contracted with anger.

Lady Bell opened her eyes widely, and gazed around her on all sides of the swaying mass with a mixture of eagerness and

distress, so vivid and painful was the vision which she had conjured up.

There were many white facings to blue coats, like that above which Lady Bell's imagination had set the sailor's face, for naval officers had abounded at the regatta; but no such face, no such expression met her search. How should it? What room was there for it?

"Have you done yourself up, Lady Bell?" inquired Master Charles with kindly concern for her involuntary shiver and the paling of her complexion.

"No, I don't think so," answered Lady Bell with hesitation, "but I should like to sit down, I should not mind going home and not waiting for the fireworks—No, I don't mean it," she corrected herself, with a faint laugh when she saw her squire's discomfiture. "I could not be so cruel, for I know how fond you are of the fireworks—don't contradict me, and I'm sure I should not know where to find Sunny, till she choose to come and fetch us."

But Lady Bell, with all her efforts, could not recover her ease and gaiety; she was restless, she soon got up, and proposed that she and Master Charles should go in pursuit of Mrs. Sundon.

Master Charles was ready to do anything Lady Bell proposed, even to giving up the fireworks, though they were the grand winding up of the evening to his country breeding.

CHAPTER VII.

CROSS PURPOSES, WITH AN OLD FACE IN A
NEW LIGHT.

MASTER CHARLES and Lady Bell strolled here and there under the rustling boughs and coloured lamps, a combination which made Vauxhall and Ranelagh look like fairyland to those happy unsophisticated people for whom fairies and fairyland never ceased to exist.

The couple walked after the principal parties, which were taking advantage of the eventual clearing up of the weather, and some one of which Lady Bell regarded as likely to have been joined by her friend.

But no Mrs. Sundon's conspicuously

elegant person could be detected in the main figure of any group.

“I should say that that was Sunny,” cried Lady Bell, stopping and peering down one of the dusky unlit side walks which were generally avoided, “if there were more people with her; but there is only one man, is there not? Why there is not even one, and it is Mrs. Sundon, I know her by the way in which she carries her train, and holds her fan. Did you ever see such avoidance of her fellows, or such foolhardiness? Sunny, Sunny!” running forward to remonstrate, as Mrs. Sundon advanced into the light, “it is not safe or right to go walking about alone, and out of the frequented parts of the grounds, as we did at Summerhill, you must know that?”

“I knew it before you could walk alone, madam,” answered Mrs. Sundon with a dubious laugh, “so that there was really no occasion for you and Master Charles coming to look after me—a nice pair of

chits to propose to take me, your elder—yours at least, Bell, and the matron of the party, under your wing,” she ended with unmistakable banter.

“Sure, there is one thing that you do not know, Sunny,” protested Lady Bell, with great gravity and earnestness, “that you are still a young and very handsome woman.”

“I think I have been told so in my day, Bell,” said Mrs. Sundon carelessly, “my day which is past, girl, for all you say,” she continued with a fall in her voice. “But what is more to the purpose, I like people to keep their promises. Where should I have been if I had gone to seek for you in the appointed alcove? There is no good in looking foolish; mind your word another time. Hark! I hear the gun fired as the signal for the fireworks, let us hurry to get good places.”

“She has turned the tables upon us,” whispered Master Charles as Mrs. Sundon preceded Lady Bell and him.

“Sunny always liked her own way,” announced Lady Bell meditatively, in an answering undertone, “and hated to be interfered with ; but then she was the last person to give just cause for interference, the very last person to commit an unreasonable, for a woman of the world, an indecorous action—don’t you think so, Master Charles?”

“I was wondering whether you reckon yourself a woman of the world, Lady Bell,” he observed lightly.

“Oh, nonsense, sir, you are aware that I am not half so wise, or for that matter so good as Sunny,” said Lady Bell pettishly.

“She may have business of her own which she wishes to conduct apart from us,” suggested Master Charles.

“What business could she conduct at Vauxhall?” Lady Bell turned upon him, questioning him sharply. “No, I will not have such an explanation ; you do not know what you are saying, Master Charles. It is disparaging to Mrs. Sundon, to make such a supposition. I should not like her to have

business to conduct apart anywhere, though I know she has her secrets," Lady Bell recollected herself, "sad, sad secrets of the past, my poor silent injured Sunny; but that is all over, and I should hate her to have business to conduct at Vauxhall."

"Well, I'm at my wits' end for anything farther to say," declared Master Charles, "unless," and here he spoke very simply and seriously, "that, knowing Mrs. Sundon to be as wise and good as you and I know her to be"—and he seemed to pause and dwell upon, not shrink from the knowledge, while an expression of reverence and devotion rose up in his round ruddy face and dignified it—"we need not fear to trust her in acts that would be unjustifiable in another."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Master Charles," cried Lady Bell warmly, "that is the very assurance I wanted; you have done me a world of good, and sure we are none of us to judge our neighbours by appearance. What would become of ourselves if we were treated in that fashion?"

It is manful of you to stand up for her on what you know of her goodness. She feared that what she did for you—because she would not content herself with merely shaking her head lackadaisically and letting you go on the road to ruin—would turn you dead against her, and make you set her down for ever after as a hectoring, domineering woman. She was so pleased to find that you were true to her and to yourself.”

“Was she?” demanded Master Charles with fervour, passing over the compliment from Lady Bell herself. “Hectoring, domineering! Does Mrs. Sundon not know that I think her the noblest and kindest of women? Does she not believe that I would do anything—die to serve her?”

“I think she gives you credit for very kindly feelings,” replied Lady Bell a little evasively and awkwardly, beginning to repent of having betrayed her companion into heroics.

“But who would have thought it?” she

put it to herself in a succession of silent considerations, "that the young fellow was so deeply and fondly grateful to Sunny?"

"It is as well that he is going to the wars, for though I would stake my life on his honour, next to Harry Fane's, there are such grievous contradictions as miserably unfortunate attachments.

"Master Charles deserves a better fate than to form such an attachment, and waste his heart and his young days upon it.

"Sunny is a very uncommon woman, a rare jewel, the more irresistible to a generous man because of her sorrows.

"She might well stand between poor Master Charles—though we think him a boy, he can appreciate her, and he grows more of a man every day—and the restoration of the Kingscotes of Nutfield. I trow Sunny would, in her very integrity, have done our boy little good in that case.

"But there will be time and space enough and to spare, for change in such an incipient, desperate attachment as his, that

is to say if it exists, during these weary wars for which Master Charles is bound, like every man worthy of the name."

Aloud Lady Bell contrived to render the too serious and suggestive conversation a jesting one.

"If you swear service so sentimentally to a third person, who is not within hearing, I vow, Master Charles, people will think you are making love to me."

"I have no objection," retorted the young fellow, piqued into sauciness by the necessity of retaliating on Lady Bell the suspicion of ridicule, which she had cast on his impulsive speech.

"But fortunately, I have the greatest objection, sir," Lady Bell nodded archly back to him. "Ah! there goes the first rocket."

Master Charles was not yet so confirmed and undone a victim to gratitude and Mrs. Sundon, as not to have a very considerable amount of excitement and glee to spend on the fireworks. "Did you ever see the

like?" he was constantly appealing to his companions, while he clapped his hands and stamped his feet, and wished in his hearty country voice, which sounded distinctly in the middle of the hubbub of the gala crowd, that he had the fireworks to set off down at Lumley. "Wouldn't they make the major sneeze and jump? There was a green cheese. Now we have a crumpled up red riband. Why they've put to shame the lamps which I thought like the Turkish rogue Aladdin's jewelled fruit, the first night—not to say our modest homely moon and stars."

Lady Bell interrupted his rhapsodies by grasping and clinging to his arm, while she drew a low sobbing breath.

"What is it, Lady Bell? Does anything ail you?" he inquired a second time that night. "Has any rascal dared to fling a squib at you? Just show him to me and I'll trounce him, though you have sustained no harm that I can see; I can tell you that for your comfort. But you're ill, poor

soul! granting that it must have come on sudden, for you were making play a moment ago."

Master Charles spoke out his regret as a relief, to his own and Mrs. Sundon's wonder and anxiety, when the glare of light fell on Lady Bell's face, scared and wild with distress, and her hands clenched from the effects of a shock, while he and Mrs. Sundon were hastening to withdraw Lady Bell from the concourse, to make her rest on Master Charles, to dispatch an attendant for a chair.

"I am better," Lady Bell strove to say with a gasp in response to their cares. "It is nothing," glancing round her terrified; "I am mortal sorry for alarming and troubling you, but I could not help it—and I must be disordered after all, for twice to-night, something which could not be, passed before my eyes." She stopped, shuddering at the idea.

"Don't think of it, child," Mrs. Sundon forbade Lady Bell with emphasis, "you

have been eating unripe fruit, or loitering about in wet shoes. I take blame to myself for not having looked better after you. God help us! I am a selfish woman to have the charge of a young thing like you."

"No, no," said Lady Bell, "it is not that. But haven't you heard," she quaked in every limb again, yet she could not let go the disturbing thought, "that deaths are sometimes made known to those most concerned in them by the appearance of the dying to the friends far away? Yet oh! sure the dying would look like themselves, as they were wont to look, not like that," moaned Lady Bell, cowering and hiding her face. Master Charles and Mrs. Sundon glanced at each other in utter perplexity.

"I have it, Mrs. Sundon," exclaimed Master Charles triumphantly, "it was the green light from some of the whirligigs. I noticed it made every body, even you, appear ghastly."

"We'll have no more, Bell," Mrs. Sundon

laid down the law authoritatively; "you are disordered, your fancy is running riot. I must get you home and to bed, when I shall prescribe for you. If you are not better to-morrow, we shall have you blooded, and you'll be all right; we'll have no more chimeras dire."

The truth was, that in one of the sudden bursts of vivid illumination which made the summer dusk all the darker by the contrast, Lady Bell had again seen for a horrible moment, borne on the crest of a wave of faces, Harry Fane's face directed towards her with a look of keen reproach and bitter scorn.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTELLIGENCE IN THE GAZETTE.

IF Lady Bell had been very sick next day, she would have been brought round marvellously, and made “pure well” by the first naval intelligence which greeted her indefatigable study of the *Gazette*. It was indeed transporting intelligence, before which all disorders and chimeras must vanish.

His Majesty’s ship *Thunderbomb*, Captain Fane, eighty guns, on its way to America, had met off the Madeiras, chased, engaged, and taken an American prize—the *Susquehannah*, Captain Humphrey, eighty-four guns.

The *Thunderbomb* having sustained considerable damage, and having come up with

other ships of the squadron, Captain Fane had been directed to transfer the troops to the *Royal Duke*, to put his own ship into the first friendly port for temporary repairs, and then to return with his prize in order that the *Thunderbomb* might be thoroughly overhauled.

In accordance with the order, the *Thunderbomb*, with the *Susquehannah* in tow, had arrived in British waters, and was lying off Portsmouth harbour.

Come home already—so soon—beyond her fondest hopes and expectation, with such honour! Lady Bell's experience of second sight, in place of having been an evil omen, as she had dreaded, had proved the most joyous of auguries. But how was it—how had it been? The coincidence was curious. Could Harry Fane have been at Vauxhall?

So far as time was concerned he might, for it was quite possible that he had travelled from Portsmouth as fast as the news of his ship's gallant exploit.

But why not come to Lady Bell at once !
Why at Vauxhall ? Above all, why in
alienation and wrath ?

A little reflection supplied one solution.
Captain Fane had probably not had a
chance, since they parted, of getting one of
Lady Bell's letters, announcing her removal
to London.

He must have gone up to town in the
first place to deliver his dispatches ; and
what old sailor lord of the Admiralty had
not been yesterday at the regatta at Vaux-
hall, where Captain Fane might have fol-
lowed his chiefs ?

But why not run to Lady Bell in the
second instance—for Harry, of all men, must
do his officer's duty first—why, instead,
keep away from her, and terrify her as
with glimpses of a rancorous, avenging
ghost ?

The only answer to be found was, that
if she had seen Harry at all, and if he had
known she was in the throng and had dis-
tinguished her, he might judge that she

would not wish an immediate and public revelation of her marriage, such as would have been risked by his giving her the overwhelming glad surprise of seeing him when she had not a grain of reason to look for him till a number of months—years even—of exposure and danger had passed.

He might fear the risk to body and mind of so great a surprise, blest as it was, coming upon her totally unprepared. He might well choose that there should not be thousands of witnesses to their reunion. But why visit the trying restraint which circumstances imposed upon him as an offence on her? Why frown upon her from a distance? This from her Harry, her best of men, who was so just, and even righteous over much, so full of yielding tenderness to herself.

Lady Bell could not, by any means, put together the last pieces of the puzzle.

But what did it signify? Harry Fane was back in England, safe and sound from

tempests and battle, within three months, as she had never dared to anticipate.

The same English sun and wind were shining and blowing on husband and wife. The same London sights and sounds which they had before looked at together, were anew presented to both of them.

Harry Fane was here to claim her when he should think fit. They might begin their bright, good life, any day.

Lady Bell was singing her *Te Deum* to herself, without a doubt that in a single delightful conversation he would explain everything which in her silliness and stupidity she misunderstood or failed to comprehend.

In the course of the silent singing of her *Te Deum*, Lady Bell sang snatches of other songs aloud, laughed, ran from room to room, and from window to window, and drove Mrs. Sundon into having grave doubts of her friend's rapid and complete recovery.

Mrs. Sundon accused Lady Bell with

reason of being still flighty if not vapourish; while Lady Bell answered Master Charles's early inquiries after her health with the most disdainful repudiation of any possibility of her having an ailment this morning, so that he was reduced to discrediting the evidence of his own senses, and to taking an opposite view of the case. He suspected the reality of Lady Bell's attack the evening before, and feared that she was learning a fine lady's whims and affectations.

“I tell you, good people, I'm as merry as a cricket, and that is a great deal merrier than a king,” said Lady Bell. “I'm as fresh as a daisy, which beats to sticks for freshness the red gilliflower to which Miss Kingscote used to compare me. It is an uncalled-for piece of impertinence in any man, woman, or child, to think I could be otherwise. ‘Fal-lal-a-fal-lal-a,’

‘ John, John, John,
The grey goose is gone ;’ ”

and then Lady Bell went and shut herself

up in her own room, sat down, and cried with sheer happiness.

Lady Bell stayed all the morning in the house. She was certain that he would find her out, and come to clasp her in his arms, whether Sunny and Master Charles were there or not. But lest there should be any mistake, lest he had not come to town with his dispatches, and her brain had been distempered during the last twenty-four hours, and because she could not write to him at his old lodgings, to which he might not have returned, and where her letter might fall into strange hands, and produce a premature exposure and grand *esclandre*, she wrote a letter chokeful of raptures to Portsmouth.

When that was done, a little reaction and longing sickness of hope deferred came over Lady Bell.

After all, Harry Fane was certainly not in London, in spite of the extraordinary intimation which she had received of his return. She should not see him this day yet.

No, she would not quail before the solemn warning of what a day or an hour might bring forth. She would look forward in unshaken faith and hope to new chances—sweetest chances, to-morrow. She must, or her fond heart would break in the midst of her anticipated happiness.

She was getting low, apprehensive—she, who ought to be so proud of being the wife of a young hero, whom every Englishman would honour since he had plucked a fresh laurel for his country. She, who ought to be so thankful to Heaven for having favoured her above so many far better women, in restoring to her her lover and husband. But it was he, and not she, who was worthy, and it ought to be enough for her to belong to him—to so great and good a man.

Lady Bell was vexed with herself for spoiling the lustre of this day by fretting over so small a disappointment as not seeing Harry Fane for another day, and by turning back and trembling afresh before the frantic

imagination of the shadow of his changed face at Vauxhall.

It was a relief to her to find that she must go out in the afternoon, after leaving the most particular messages with regard to her destination, and to the time when she would be back, for the benefit of any lagging caller at her lodging in the Hay-market.

The fact was, Lady Bell had an appointment of many days' standing—an appointment which she had held till this very morning, when she had forgotten all about it, to be of importance, and which it was for Captain Fane's interest, as well as hers, that she should keep.

It had been in a loving, foolish dream of benefiting him, of winning for him a portion equal to his largest share of prize money, that Lady Bell had been tempted to invest a portion of her yearly income in a lottery. This was the first of the days fixed for the drawing of the lottery tickets at the Museum—days which thousands of holders of

tickets, and fractions of tickets, had written on heart and brain.

Lady Bell was a ticket holder, and what if she should gain the fifteen thousand pounds prize wherewith to endow her sailor?

The sum would form an ample provision for their establishment—a redemption from the gulf of genteel poverty—a vindication to their prudent friends of the improper conduct of the couple who, without reference to fortune, had fallen in love and rushed into matrimony.

Of course it was just possible that Lady Bell might not gain the highest prize; but though it came to the worst, it was only the loss of a small slice of one year's income.

Lady Bell had agreed to drive to the Museum in the coach of an old lady of her acquaintance, the same who had induced her to take the ticket, and who herself dabbled in every pie of the kind which she could come across.

Two Bluecoat boys were employed, as an odd branch of their education, to draw the tickets out of the wheel ; and the numbers drawn, with their results, were immediately placarded, for the information of the great crowd that filled the street.

By the time Lady Bell and Mrs. Dormer drove up, files of carriages were wedged into such a living mass as Lady Bell in all her sight-seeing had never beheld.

“Upon my word, it is as good as a hanging,” said the old lady gaily. “Now that we’ve got in we’ll be kept here for hours, you may depend upon it. It is lucky that we took our dinner before we came. What is the last announcement? You have better eyes than I, Lady Bell ; but even I can pick out that if our numbers ain’t there, neither are the fifteen, nor the ten, nor the five thousand prizes. I had a runner, with his pen behind his ear, to bring me the earlier lists.”

“Shouldn’t you have heard, madam, without that trouble ?” asked Lady Bell.

“I am forced to be particular,” explained Mrs. Dormer, “for I always insure against the day’s drawing, in order that I may have an additional chance of winning a penny; for bless us and save us, there are such rogues in this world! Ain’t it breathless work?—the cards is nothing to it.”

In the thick of such breathless work, Lady Bell sat waiting till placard after placard was put out, devoured by greedy eyes, and at intervals, as it contained one of the prizes, was received with a general hoarse roar of strangely blended congratulation and condolence—congratulation for the one, or by comparison, the few winners who held alone or in company the lucky number; condolence for the many losers.

Lady Bell’s thoughts wandered. Worn out with agitation, she grew tired, depressed. She could not bear to see the tremulous head and bleared eyes of her aged companion acquire a kind of spasmodic steadiness and intentness, as they turned unfailingly

towards the greatest gambling booth in the country.

If Lady Bell could count no other cost, she could reckon what might be the loss to herself this day of an interminable seat opposite the Museum. She could calculate feverishly what might be happening in the rooms in the Haymarket in her absence. She began to rue her haste to be rich, though it were mainly for the sake of another. Above all, she was sorry for the inconvenient mode and time which she had taken to acquire her riches.

CHAPTER IX.

DRAWING A BLANK IN THE LOTTERY OF LIFE.

MRS. DORMER sought to improve the tediousness, which was no tediousness to her, of the process, by garrulously retailing to her own content the incidents of all the crowds which had come within her experience, especially of one in the days of her youth. It was not on the occasion of a lottery, or a coronation, or a royal lying in state, but of all things one of Mr. Whitfield's meetings among the furze and gorse, and serving to scare away the footpads of Blackheath.

“He called the painted bits of paste-board the Devil's books, my dear, and I ha'n't touched the cards to speak of—never

as some of my generation have done ; but I don't think the severest of the preachers could say a word against the lotteries, since they are the only mode by which we poor bodies of quality can hope to become rich and charitable before we die."

At that moment Lady Bell, who had been leaning back in the coach, leapt up radiant.

"Don't say you've gained, and I got the number for you, and took another for myself," cried the old woman with a groan of exasperation, as she broke off her narrative.

"No, no, Mrs. Dormer, what do I care?" Lady Bell assured her friend impatiently. "Take the ticket and keep it, if you like. But do you see these gentlemen pushing their way through, t'other side of the street? I must speak to one of them. I tell you he is the naval officer whose ship has just done so splendidly in taking an American prize."

"Ah ! what giddy things these widows

are—their heads constantly running on men,” sighed Mrs. Dormer, aside, with virtuous indignation, as Lady Bell, between desperation and ecstasy, losing sight of everything but Harry Fane over the way, within twenty yards of her, threw open the coach door, leant out, and waved her handkerchief to attract his notice.

“Care for him in a patriotic way, I dare say!” Mrs. Dormer continued to mumble sardonically, while the gentleman thus summoned had to elbow a passage to the coach door. “A good enough pair of legs, but as forbidding a face as ever I saw. Oh, these widows, these widows! they will put their heads in nooses!”

Lady Bell had been guilty of great demonstration in order to bring Captain Fane to her, and yet, when he came slowly to the side of the coach—compelled to do so by his companions, who had observed the signal, and called his attention to it—she sat motionless, though the door was wide open for her to spring out.

But the bright colour sank as rapidly as it had flamed into her cheeks. She had not a word to say—the words froze on her lips as her eyes grew fixed in dismay. “Harry Fane could never act unkind to her, never look unkind on her,” she had said to herself with the fullest conviction, only the night before, to dissipate effectually the tantalising terror which had haunted her; and now, in broad daylight, she had ocular demonstration, unless her senses had forsaken her altogether, that Harry Fane *could* look unkind on her; for it was with a sullen, lowering brow bent on her that he approached the coach.

This was the greeting, on his return, of the three months’ husband who had persuaded her into a secret marriage, and parted from her after its celebration had made her his till death, coming back once and again to hold her in his embrace, and to dash from his eyes the tears which did no dishonour to his manhood.

“Your servant, Lady Bell *Trevor*,” said Harry Fane, with deadly coldness, and he waited as if for the commands of the young creature whose unlimited trust in him and devotion to him, were withering and shrivelling before his pitiless face.

Her heart was smitten with a bolt, her brain was on fire, her tongue was tied except to stammer out a senseless “You are here, Captain Fane.” For she was beginning to wonder wildly was it a dream after all—a delusion—her closest connection with this man, her tenderest regard for him, bought by his passionate regard for her?

Just then another announcement of numbers, and of a prize drawn, was stuck up.

Mrs. Dormer, fancying that she saw one of her numbers in the list, and renouncing the hope of any further assistance in reading the column from Lady Bell, beckoned in her turn, out of the coach window on Mrs. Dormer’s side, to a tradesman whom she patronised, in the crowd. She got

him to stand on the step of the coach, and condescended to lay her head to his, and plunge into the information which he conveyed to her. Mrs. Dormer was so deeply engaged, that Lady Bell and Captain Fane, at the opposite side of the coach, might have vowed love or plotted treason without the least danger of discovery.

Fortune, as usual, favoured the couple who would not, or could not, avail themselves of her favour.

Lady Bell did rouse herself with a great sigh, and strive to break the meshes of the web which was being woven round her, to get out of the entanglement of the wretched mystery.

“Why did you not write to me that you were come back, Harry?” she bent towards him and whispered imploringly.

“I should not have known where to write to, madam,” he answered, as hard as ever, and with a cruel taunt in his next words. “It was not my fault that you were not prepared, and happily I was not

left to waste my time by going down to the address with which you had favoured me."

She was so guiltless of beguiling him, that the taunt at least did not hurt her, did not reach her in fact.

"Oh yes, no doubt you thought I was at Summerhill," she replied, eagerly catching at any straw of explanation—excuse for him, hope for her.

He neither smiled nor said another word. She was forced to be the speaker, with her heart sinking like lead in her bosom, more and more heavily every moment, with desperation and despair growing upon her. And she had been so happy only that morning! Her reliance on him had been perfect, her faith unbroken from first to last. Her fall was so great, so inexplicable.

"I only saw that the *Thunderbomb* had come home with a prize in the news prints this morning."

She did not dare to break off and inquire,

“But were you not at Vauxhall last night?” though she remembered it, and the further stab of the remembrance caused her to catch her breath, and prevented her from adding the simple truth, if she could have spoken it then, “It was the happiest moment of my life,” and from exclaiming, “How brave and fortunate you have been, sir; how I rejoice in your bravery and our good fortune!” Instead, she stumbled on with her irrelevant words, “I had to come here, as I had promised Mrs. Dormer. I have a ticket in the lottery, and who knows but I shall take the head prize?”

He crushed harshly the little piteous appeal to his interest in her concerns. “I don’t envy you if you do,” he said; “lightly won is lightly held. I endorse that proverb. Besides, these lotteries are abominable swindles, fit only for a corrupt and false age. I once saw a man who had staked his last shilling for a blank—he wore a blue jacket, too, and had just come from a cruise—blow his brains out

on these walls. But come, I am not fool enough to flatter myself that my poor sailor's experience and opinion of lotteries will weigh a thistledown with a fine lady. I am only detaining her from attending to her proper business." And with another fierce sneer, like the madman he was at that moment, and an ostentatiously low bow, Harry Fane drew back, rejoined his friends, and passed on with them, while Lady Bell looked after him blankly, with lack-lustre eyes.

At the same instant Mrs. Dormer's cracked voice protested irritably, "You'll give me the rheumatism with that open door, Lady Bell Trevor. There's a draught blowing through the coach enough to winnow corn. We need not wait here any longer, since, as I suppose you know, neither you nor me has gained—we're both thrown out, and we can get nothing now for our payment and pains. But we may have better luck another time. I've a share in the Westminster, and another

ticket in the next Museum lottery. They can't all come to grief?" she said anxiously.

Mrs. Dormer got no answer, and she proceeded to take some comfort from the reflection, "Lady Bell's wits are to seek—no use to prick numbers with her. She'll come to grief to a certainty, if she take on so for a sea-water dog of a fellow, rude and gruff, I'll warrant him. Ah, those widows, those widows! they've not had their tirings of men. The widows will have more of the men, and the more masterful they are, the better the silly, weak fools are pleased with their bargain to begin with. Manly, forsooth! manly to snub a fine woman, turn a cold shoulder on her, have her running after the gallant fellow and laying the hair of her head beneath his feet, till the tide turn."

When Lady Bell descended from the coach, and walked into the lodgings in the Haymarket, she looked so small, poor, and forlorn, such a contrast to the beaming girl of the morning, that Mrs. Sundon felt

called upon to meet her friend with loud remonstrances. "I told you that you would do yourself up, Bell; you were in a most absurd key this morning, after your last night's disorder. You were wound up to a pitch at which you must break down."

"So I was, Sunny," Lady Bell in her collapse acknowledged faintly, "and now I am weary to death. Let me lie down away from the light, and forget myself and all the world."

She seemed to see it all in one consuming lightning flash, which licked up love, truth, life itself. Harry Fane did not wish to acknowledge her as his wife, and how could she claim him for her husband against his will?

He cast her from him, as men and women were sometimes renounced, when there was treachery in these secret marriage vows. She had no friend qualified to call him to account, and to what purpose would it be when — not his power, but his desire to

deny her, was the “damning fact” to her consciousness?

Why he had proved false, and that on so short a trial of absence, or if he had deceived her from the beginning, she could not tell.

He had detested and despised the gay world, with its fine ladies. It looked almost to Lady Bell’s bewilderment as if he had sought savagely to humble her in the light of the representative of her class. He had humbled in the dust the birth, breeding, and few charms of which she had been vain, but which, when humbled, might appear paltry and mawkish in the eyes of a worldly and wicked man. She had not sufficient fortune to bribe him to behave to her with the barest honour of an officer and gentleman, supposing in that case the poor purchase had been worth the purchase money.

CHAPTER X.

BEARING ONE'S OWN AND ONE'S NEIGHBOUR'S BURDENS.

SUCH an awakening—awful and heart-rending as it ever is, and must be to a woman—was not peculiar to Lady Bell. She was not the first, nor would she be the last woman to make a fatal mistake, and squander the treasures of a life at one rash venture.

Lady Bell was the very woman to call to mind that bitter but wholesome consolation, and to act upon it. Even as a child she had hidden her wounds, and tried to go on her way, with such a child's half-comical, but far more pathetic reserve and dignity.

Much more as a woman betrayed and

bereft, Lady Bell rose up like the great Eastern King after the stroke had fallen, when he washed his face, anointed his head, ate and drank, and went in and out before his people.

Lady Bell came tripping down the morning after she had seen Captain Fane again, when he had met her as a stranger and an enemy, and left her ten times worse than a widow. She ate her breakfast with Sunny, and was resolute in turning all observation from her own wan face and deficient appetite.

She entered fully into all the plans and arrangements for the day. She was ready then and afterwards for her little joke with Master Charles. She would die sooner than make a sign of the misery which had overtaken her.

She was not a very proud woman either, or very sensible of wrong-doing and the shame which was its portion; rather, she was delicate-minded and high-hearted. It was not so much that she would never

submit to be pitied—not to say blamed—as that she believed that all the world was to be pitied more or less, and she did not see what she had to do in monopolising a great share of the world's pity.

Some writers will have it that in life it goes in this fashion. Women disguising their troubles are poor little household hypocrites, with a petty regard for keeping up appearances and hoodwinking their neighbours. The hypocrisy balances and lightens the misery, which can never be tremendous. In the faculty of simple endurance, of keeping their pain to themselves, and making a profession of sympathy with the pleasure of others, women are greater than men, but that only by a half-contemptible feigning and shamming; while women are less than men in the capacity of honest, unmitigated suffering.

It may be so; but the man or the woman who wears his or her heart upon the sleeve that friends may smart and burn in unison with its gashes and bruises, as well as that

daws may peck at it, is wanting in true generosity and true delicacy, is a coward, an egotist, and most likely a fool.

Lady Bell would not, for all that remained to her in the world, have increased by a reflection of her anguish, the burden of cares of their own which Mrs. Sundon and Master Charles must have, sooner or later, to bear. It was her one comfort, that they were not acquainted with a jot or tittle of her dreadful misfortune, and she trusted to be able to keep them in happy ignorance. For this end, no sacrifice of mere feeling and inclination would be too much.

True, Lady Bell did not care very much what became of her. She felt morally stunned, sick, and dizzy—like a person who, having fallen over a precipice, and escaped death, creeps feebly and half blindly along the rocky waste where he finds himself.

She had a dawning sense of retribution—a conviction that she had made the thorny bed on which she was forced to lie,

and have her delicate flesh pierced and torn at every movement. Repentance was beginning to work; still that was no reason why Mrs. Sundon and Master Charles, who had to fight alone their own temptations and tribulations, were to be punished for Lady Bell's sins, as well as her sorrows, all as a reward for their friendship.

She might have made them partakers of her happy, triumphant secret (woe's me! what a transformation it had undergone, when that which Lady Bell had conceived to be her safeguard and glory had proved her ruin and disgrace); but now, though she were to pine, and sink under her load, she would die silent.

Her pride was up in arms along with her magnanimity. What! tell even Sunny that she, Lady Bell, had been so defrauded and betrayed; be lamented over, if not condemned and scorned; be urged, and constrained to wrest her poor rights from the man whom she had so worshipped, that it seemed rending her very nature in twain to

dethrone and degrade him—not in the eyes of the world, but in her solitary estimation.

Never, never. Captain Fane should go scatheless and free, for Lady Bell, to perpetrate new barbarities under the guise of blunt frankness and high-minded philosophy.

Mrs. Sundon and Master Charles were blinded. Doubtless their eyes, like the rest of our eyes, would have been sharper if they had not been turned in upon and held fast by their own affairs.

Master Charles was in anticipation of the orders to follow the main body of his regiment to America, where the war was still raging with unabated fury.

Though General Lee was said to have been taken prisoner, and Sir Guy Carleton to have been victorious in defending Canada against Arnold and Montgomery, the rebels still made such head, that unless Mr. Washington finally defeated Lord Cornwallis—which Master Charles could not bring him-

self to believe—there was no prospect of the war's drawing to a conclusion.

Master Charles's heart had been set on seeing service. In addition to a high-spirited young man's love of adventure and desire for distinction, Master Charles had taken up arms, not as the makeshift occupation of a man of established rank and wealth, but as the serious profession in which he, Charles Kingscote, was to strive to retrieve the wasted fortunes of his family, and to make for himself a fresh name and position.

Master Charles's career as a soldier was, as far as man could tell, his single opportunity of justifying the good offices of his friends and neighbours, and rising permanently from obscurity. The sooner, therefore, that Master Charles went "a-campaigning," as his sister called it, the better for him in all respects.

Yet the young man's heart began to be divided and distracted, like Lady Bell's nature. There were lights in which he was

loth to go off to the wars at this time, of all other, to lose much that he prized, not only with terribly little certainty of finding it again, but with the suspicion springing up and gaining ground upon him, that he was leaving his friends in dubious case.

But it was for Mrs. Sundon that Master Charles's heart was beginning to ache with care.

Both these young women had opened a new world to Master Charles; both had been like sisters to him. But while Lady Bell had at one time, in the early days of their intercourse, half affronted him and given him cause for blame and forbearance, she had not in the end been more to him than a kind-hearted, gay, and gifted young sister, with whom he had played, and of whom he was proud.

Mrs. Sundon had risen up before the lad as a goddess, saint, and martyr. She was more beautiful than Lady Bell, wiser, wittier, even as Mrs. Sundon had been in her time more cruelly tried.

And oh ! Mrs. Sundon was far more condescending, for had she not stepped into the breach in order to arrest a lout and a fool of a fellow who was stumbling headlong down the first steps to ruin ? She had nobly and sweetly offered to lay bare her own sacred sorrows, for the purpose of warning a rash and stupid young sinner, who ought not to have needed warning.

Master Charles had been at the age when young men prefer goddesses to women, and queens to beggar-maids. Before he had time to grow older, the mischief was done in a heart which was as true as it was tender. He hardly required to recognise, as he now recognised, in his serene goddess a yearning woman, in his queen a subtle suppliant, in order to continue to be her sworn and devoted servant.

Being as true and modest, this plain young country gentleman, for a man, as she was for a woman—knowing Mrs. Sundon to be the blameless wife of a wretched lost man—Master Charles never, in his

inmost heart, called her by any nearer and dearer name than that of his patron saint, removed from him as heaven is from earth, his guiding star, far above him, his lady, to whom he could not be more than the humble, faithful squire which she accounted him, and permitted him to be.

Master Charles was content, he said bravely and steadfastly to himself, with these titles of honour. To have dreamt of any other titles would have been to inflict on Mrs. Sundon a gross insult, against which, as dealt by another, he would have been the first to fire up in rage and disgust.

Thus Master Charles stifled and trampled down passion, not even allowing it spiritual breath or voice, as every man and woman—be they young or be they old, or be they simple as wayfaring men—can, if they will, with Christ in heaven above them, resist every devil of unlawful desire till it flee from them.

But such resistance, with its strong cease-

less guard, was rapidly converting Master Charles's pleasant, thoughtless boyishness into what was more honourable, if less light-hearted, until thoughtful manhood was stamping his brow with gravity, and slowing his step.

His playfellow, Lady Bell, actually began to view him with serious respect, as well as affection, and to stand a little in awe of him. When he was cross now—an accident of rarer occurrence than the pettishness of which he had been guilty when he was an idle, restless lad, but even as his crossness had a deeper root in real provocation, so it was more formidable—Lady Bell ceased to set herself to torment him, even if she had still had the heart for the sport, and learnt to feel for him, and let him alone.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. SUNDON'S PURSUIT OF PLEASURE.

LADY BELL'S vague suspicions had not been necessary for Master Charles to see for himself, soon after the friends were settled in London, that much was changed with Mrs. Sundon.

It was not an outward and conventional change, simply or principally, and it was certainly not a change in her kindness to him. Yet her habits, her state of mind, the degree and nature of her regard for her friends, had each sustained alteration and modification. And all this weighed on Master Charles's mind, producing discomfiture and apprehension.

Master Charles's faith in his lady was

not shattered, like Lady Bell's in her best of men; it was not even tarnished. It was such, that he could, as he had told Lady Bell, trust Mrs. Sundon, whatever were the appearances; but it vexed and mortified him that appearances were against her, and that she should subject herself to scandal and slander.

In the near prospect of quitting Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell, and the very country which contained them—of no longer being at hand to befriend them for many months at least, with the conviction that something was wrong in Mrs. Sundon's life, while he had not even her confidence in what was wrong, the sworn champion staggered under the weight of uneasiness and perplexity which might of itself have overcome a mature man.

Why should Mrs. Sundon, with Lady Bell sure to be following in her wake, have become reckless in the pursuit of pleasure? Why should the two ladies appear, like wandering stars of the first

magnitude, in order to be crowded round and stared at among the second-rate company at Marylebone Gardens and Bagnigge Wells? There was no occasion for the condescension here, as there had been for the ladies of Summerhill's countenance of neighbourly merrymakings at Lumley, where Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell had been well known and looked up to.

It was a very different question when there was no neighbourly obligation, to speak of, and when the reasons for this promenade and that cricket match and its ball, which the ladies chose to patronise, were no better reasons than those of thrusting into higher society the promoters—notoriously vulgar, grasping upstarts, old candle-makers, or fraudulent brokers—with their bouncing, bridling wives and daughters.

It was in such company that one might meet in flocks ladies and gentlemen of the shadiest antecedents, received solely because, however stained and bemired, the indivi-

duals had been ladies and gentlemen, and were nearly the only representatives of the class that frequented these quarters.

Master Charles had guessed that Lady Sundon, of Sundon Green, with whom Lady Bell had lived during her earlier sojourn in town, was an easy-going dame; but she had been more careful in the company which she kept, according to Lady Bell's conversation.

Mrs. Sundon constantly appointed Master Charles to attend her and Lady Bell in public, and as constantly gave him for a partner to Lady Bell, to stroll, dance, sit, and sup with, until the couple became conspicuously inseparable.

In the meantime Mrs. Sundon gratified the whim of the moment. She had a wide circle of acquaintance, and she would flit from this person to that, and greet and converse with a variety of men and women, down to threadbare parsons and out-at-elbows half-pay officers.

Lady Bell, not to say Master Charles,

knew none of these strangers; but Mrs. Sundon, while jealous of any other and more suitable intruder into their party, was careless in permitting these shabby-genteel satellites to hang about and attach themselves to her.

Mrs. Sundon was mistress of the situation, such as it was, and perfectly independent of control. Those relations whom she had alienated in the past by her marriage with Gregory Sundon, were dead or scattered abroad.

Latterly, Lady Bell had appeared content to do Mrs. Sundon's bidding with even laborious fidelity, and without a single objection or murmur.

Along with Mrs. Sundon's refusal of, and impatience with interference, her abstraction and pre-occupation, amounting to flurry—the reverse of her old calmness—were increasing upon her, till they prevented her from being clearly aware of the surprise or disapproval of her companions.

There was nothing to be done, and only

this to be said—that Mrs. Sundon was granting license to all the scandal-mongers in town to join in a proclamation which caused the blood of one lad, who knew better than all the rest of the world put together, to boil. Madam Sundon had become infatuated, or she had not been so wise and good, after all ! Poor Greg Sundon had doubtless had his trials, of which he had said nothing while the union lasted.

Madam Sundon was sharing the common weakness, and coming down to the easy level of her neighbours ; only she was making a prodigious crash, and a greater mess than most people made, because she had been so furiously sage and virtuous in her day.

After having been counted a miracle of ill-bestowed excellence and discretion at nineteen and twenty, Mrs. Sundon had fallen through her part, and was as foolish and imprudent as a woman could be, before she was three years older.

Mrs. Sundon was leading the last winter's

beauty, Lady Bell Trevor—a little conceited chatterbox and coquet, who had gone in, too, for sense and domesticity, for country life, and all that sort of thing—a sorry dance. The sole resource for Lady Bell would be that young man from the country, that raw ensign, whom the two fine ladies kept in leading-strings, dangling at their tails. He might break the fall of the beauty and toast, by consenting to mend her damaged reputation, carrying it away to have change of air among the Cherokees and the Pequods.

There was one natural question that Master Charles was for ever putting to himself, in all its branches—could Mrs. Sundon still retain an association with Gregory Sundon, banished by his own deed, through some of his old allies and accomplices? Was she even now holding communication with them? Was it they who, preying upon her and bringing her into trouble, rendered her regardless of her own interest and that of others?

To concede such a possibility, which the heartless world had forgotten, was also utterly repugnant to Master Charles. To continue to link the fortunes of the noble woman whom he revered and adored, with those of the miserable man who had forfeited his claim to every honest man and woman's regard, was in itself, to Master Charles's mind, to do discredit to his mistress, and be disloyal to her. Master Charles had heard how keenly Mrs. Sundon had resented her husband's infidelity and falsehood at the time that he sinned against her; how relentlessly, in outraged love and truth, for her child's sake as well as for her own, she had severed the bond at once and for ever between her and Gregory Sundon. To suppose that Mrs. Sundon had consented to renew intercourse with her husband by the double humiliation of go-betweens, was to suppose her guilty of the utmost inconsistency, while laying down her dignity, her self-respect, and her sense, while pal-

tering with her own conscience, and dallying with temptation. In believing that, Master Charles must believe her guilty of weakness and fickleness, as dishonouring to her as it was incredible to him.

King George was going to hold a review on Clapham Common of troops bound for America, and among the soldiers was Master Charles's contingent.

A great gathering of Londoners of every degree would go out to indulge their propensity for seeing sights, and to have an easy taste of the pomp of glorious war.

Mrs. Sundon proposed to follow the multitude, and Lady Bell agreed to the proposal, as she would have agreed in those dim, crowded, haunted days, to attempt to ascend to the moon in a balloon, or to start at a moment's notice for Timbuctoo, taking the source of the Niger in the way, had either of these expeditions been suggested to her.

The presence of his fair friends at the review would be flattering to Master

Charles, and he longed in his secret soul to show off his marching and counter-marching, wheeling and saluting before such bright eyes. But he was sufficiently disinterested to consider that he could not afford Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell his attendance on this occasion.

It had come to this, that Master Charles recognised, with sad ground for being disconcerted and disturbed on his friends' account, that somehow Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell were wilfully and wantonly cutting themselves off from the companionship of their equals.

The ladies could command an ample train of followers any day, but that train was ceasing to include ladies like themselves, and friends faithful as Master Charles.

Master Charles ventured for the first time to make some awkward opposition to Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell's showing themselves at this public place.

A review was tiresome work to on-lookers, especially to ladies, Master Charles

said. This would be nothing but shifting clouds of dust and moving bits of red cloth, intolerable in such weather, with all the tag-rag and bob-tail of London looking on. He was to march to the ground with his men, and he might have to return as he had come. If he might make so bold as to advise, Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell had better stay at home.

Mrs. Sundon's indignation blazed up in a moment, yet Master Charles had known her the most even-tempered and reasonable of women.

“What, sir, are we to be drilled like your soldiers, and that by a greybeard of an officer? Look, Bell, and tell me if his beard has sprouted during the night. I think that we have been only too good to you. If there has been any impropriety going, it has been in our allowing you to dance attendance upon us everywhere; so that we are not so much the worse as you, in your conceit, suppose, for the lack of you during one day.”

“Mrs. Sundon,” implored Master Charles, “you mistake my meaning.”

But she paid no heed to him. “A widow! let her be ever so charming, and a faded humdrum matron—a mother to boot! Ah, my Caro,” — Mrs. Sundon turned away clasping her hands, till she wrung them hard, — “when shall I see you again? To think your mother is to be insulted!”

“On my life, madam—” cried Master Charles in desperation.

“And all because we were fit to dispense with a long lad of a subaltern walking after us,” Mrs. Sundon interrupted him ruthlessly. “I did not imagine that you were a sentinel standing guard on us, Master Charles,” she said more coolly, but still alleging a liberty and an offence on his part.

“Mrs. Sundon, I know that I have been shocking rude,” confessed the poor fellow, in the utmost confusion and distress at her anger, fearing that he had gone too

far, and done more harm than good, and that she would forbid him her house and presence next, and find herself alone in a dreary labyrinth; "I'll promise never to offend so again."

"Oh, a truce to quarrelling; now you take matters too seriously," said Mrs. Sundon, hastily nodding pardon to her humble servant as she left the room.

"Indeed, Master Charles, I think you had better repeat the offence," commented Lady Bell, startled into an independent judgment. "We are going too fast, and seem to be forgetting what is due to ourselves. I don't know what has come over us, or the world neither. But what does it signify?" she wound up with a dismal sigh.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REVIEW AT CLAPHAM—MRS. SUNDON'S
INTRODUCTION TO CAPTAIN FANE.

THE review was a very grand review, and had points of special interest. In addition to the King, the Duke of Wurtemberg was there. Among the nobility were their Graces of Northumberland—not Duchess Anne, whom Lady Bell had heard haranguing the election mob from a window in Covent Garden, but Duchess Elizabeth, who, with her Duke, had given a pledge to the bloody civil war far away—for was not Earl Percy at that moment leading the British and Hessians among the sumacs and maples of Flat Bush?

But more attractive, and winning considerably more attention than dukes—royal and noble, foreign or native—were the Indian chiefs who were then on a visit to England, and who, as allies of the English, were treated with marked respect by King George himself.

The chiefs' appearance was hybrid in the extreme on the occasion, for they wore their native dresses over English suits of clothes, and had ensigns' breastplates, while they held hatchets in their hands, and displayed war paint on their faces.

Before the review, the order had been given that officers and men should be dressed alike, with their hair arranged in the same fashion, while in the war, that they might not be distinguished from each other by the American riflemen. One of the ceremonies of the day was the presentation of felt caps with black feathers, in common to all.

But in many respects the review was much like other reviews a century later.

The troops might be a little clumsier in their manœuvres, and at once laxer and more rigid in their discipline ; but this was a field-day, and there was no such dispensation in dress and manners to men meaning work presently, as that afforded to the Guards in their renowned march to Finchley.

The seasonable summer weather served to make the red-coats redder, and to reflect the red in the bluff faces above them. Even his Majesty, in full uniform, was crimson in the royal cheeks. Lady Bell, sitting with Mrs. Sundon on a stand, said the whole corps were like boiled lobsters.

“Do you prefer blue jackets, Bell?” Mrs. Sundon put it to her friend without any double meaning.

“Because they are like lobsters unboiled, and may change their colour—is that a reason for a preference, Sunny?” asked Lady Bell with apparent flippancy, while writhing under the simple question.

There was a great deal of shouting and

counter-shouting, of what looked to outsiders like performances nipped in the bud, and floundering failures, as the troops lumbered here and there.

But the inspecting officers, who ought to have known, declared themselves satisfied, and the King added his good-natured words of praise before he retired into the welcome tent provided for the royal shelter and refreshment.

An ample enough gathering of the wives and daughters of the officers under review kept Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell in countenance, in their grace shown to Master Charles, who had become coy.

But after a word or two of greeting, Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell fell apart from the mass of their kind, with the fatality which had lately beset the pair. Yet if their suspicious sisters had overheard the friends' conversation, it would have been found to be on no more reprehensible person than Miss More, of Bristol, whom Mrs. Sundon had once met in a Clapham country house,

and whom the place recalled to her mind for a moment, when Mrs. Sundon seized the opportunity to commend Miss More as a woman of the soundest, most enlightened understanding, to Lady Bell.

Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell were the two handsomest, but not the most enviable women at the review. They were drawing to themselves an annoying amount of observation, and were frequently accosted with more freedom than was agreeable to the ladies, by slight acquaintances among the host of men congregated at what was a man's spectacle.

Even in these circumstances (and when they were scarcely done with talking of the excellent Miss More), Mrs. Sundon detached herself from Lady Bell, stepping aside a pace to take a particular message which a man-servant had come up to deliver to Mrs. Sundon. Lady Bell could not identify the peach and grey livery, and she had an instinctive consciousness that she would never learn that message.

As the assembled troops were broken up, a company of dragoons came galloping in Lady Bell's direction ; a panic overcame her, and in trying to get out of the horse-men's way, she ran farther apart from Mrs. Sundon standing talking to the servant, and in front of the very hoofs which Lady Bell had sought to avoid.

Lady Bell was stopped by a gentleman, who pulled her aside and let the dragoons clatter by.

" I vow I did not know whom I had the honour to assist," protested a voice cruel as death to Lady Bell in its formality, and its disclaiming all connection with her or interest in her ; and there, under a naval officer's blue coat and cocked hat, towered the figure and frowned the face of Harry Fane. " Your friends, madam, are remiss in their care."

Lady Bell gave him no answer, and made no sign. She was ready to sink with fright and exhaustion, but she would sink before she would cling to the protection of the man who had sworn to protect her.

Mrs. Sundon came up. "Why, Bell, what made you scuttle into mischief?" She was reproaching her friend lightly, since no harm was done. "Master Charles is to attend us home. He has just come up, and it seems he is not to march back with his men. I've been telling him that he sets his felt cap and black feathers pretty well, and he is gone to see after the carriage. Sir, I have to thank you that this lady was not overridden, and left with the only broken bones on the field. Present your friend, Bell, whether he be an old friend or a new acquaintance," Mrs. Sundon ended, looking inquisitively at the ungracious man who, after coming to Lady Bell's help, was regarding her so stiffly and coldly.

"I knew a little of the gentleman ages ago," answered Lady Bell huskily, in a voice that was strange to her own ears, and without any distinct consciousness that she was not speaking the truth.

Lady Bell had met Captain Fane for the first time six months since, and in the in-

terval she had bound herself to him by the most solemn vow.

Yet, so far as her feelings at that moment were concerned, she might have known him in a former state of existence ; and she had lived to be cut off from him as the living are cut off from the dead. Therefore she was able to say his name with a painful, mechanical effort, like a person compelled to speak by the will of another.

“ Captain Fane, Mrs. Sundon,” said Lady Bell with dry throat and parched lips, but without faltering.

“ Ah ! Captain Fane. I daresay I have heard you mention the name,” observed Mrs. Sundon with carelessness, as she curtsied. “ We shall dispense with troubling the gentleman farther, shan’t we, Bell ? ”

“ Certainly,” assented Lady Bell, in the same forced and distant manner.

“ I cannot leave women to be trampled under horses’ feet, or assailed by the scum of a review ground,” said Harry Fane sullenly.

“ Oh, for that matter, be on no ceremony,

sir," cried Mrs. Sundon superciliously ;
"yonder is our carriage awaiting us, and
our friend coming to lead us to it."

At these words he walked away, raising
his hat more as a trick of custom, than as
a deliberate act of leave-taking.

"What a sea hedgehog!" exclaimed Mrs.
Sundon indignantly. "I thought that sort
of person had died out of the service. And
he looked like a gentleman, too, and hardly
in his prime! But it is clear he hates us
poor women like poison, and thinks us as
much out of place at a review as if we had
taken possession of his horrid quarter-deck.
A sort of fellow that no woman of spirit
could put up with for five minutes."

"No, Sunny," replied Lady Bell absently.

"No, we don't want him," Mrs. Sundon
continued to congratulate herself and her
friend on Captain Fane's abrupt dismissal.
"To bristle up on the plea of being com-
pelled to see us to a place of safety, while
he caused us to suffer from his prickles all
the way, and was prepared to stick them

into any unlucky wight who might dare to approach us ! I have known something in my day of these rough buccancers, the old sea admirals, and how they despised the race of women to whom the mothers that bore them belonged. I was wrong in supposing that such sailors had become extinct ; at least, they have left their sons, smoothed down a little in keeping with the time, to maintain the breed. Come, Bell, you are not minding me ; you have not recovered from your fright, or you are so silly as to pay heed to a snarling booby."

Lady Bell was thinking that surely she remembered Harry Fane, and that not many months ago, different.

Had hate to her and the galling sense of the tie which existed between them, changed him so much for the worse ?

Caustic he had been, and a little severe perhaps, as young men who hold a high standard are apt to be ; but how often his cousin, Lady Sundon, had spoken of him as "that good fellow Harry ;" how well-

disposed and even indulgent, in spite of his growls, he had always shown himself to Sir Peter, Lady Sundon, and their daughters! These friends of old standing had trusted in Harry Fane's kindness. How willing he had been to advise and raise Lady Bell's tastes and pursuits, when he could have hardly hoped to profit by the raising! How earnest he had been in the midst of his occasional gruffness for the general good! Lady Bell pondered the lamentable contradiction wearily, and forgot for a moment to consider corresponding contradictions.

She herself had been brought very near to denying Harry Fane's acquaintance to his face. She had allowed Mrs. Sundon to decline his attendance, and openly and ostentatiously to substitute that of another man, who had not Harry Fane's right to escort them. She had let Harry Fane go again without the least hint of giving or getting an address for the purpose of entering into communication and explanation with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIAL OF ELIZABETH, DUCHESS OF KINGSTON.

THERE was to be a show in London which was fit to detain the great world from Brighthelmstone and Tunbridge. It was a spectacle which could only occur once in a generation, if so often, and which concerned the quality closely.

The excitement and intrigues to get places to witness the sight were as great as those felt and employed on the occasion of a coronation, and men and women went in like manner to sit for many hours in full dress, and listen, if not to anthems and prayers, to speeches.

The men who were not in robes of office,

wore uniform, court suits, stars, and ribands. The women were in white satin, and sky-blue and crimson velvet, though they were under the necessity of abstaining from their high plumes, because these obstructed the view.

The view was of a solitary woman, with her attendants, in mourning, standing as a prisoner at the bar of the House of Peers. In order to watch her and hear her fate, the play and the lotteries were abandoned. What spectacle or what cast of the dice could equal that of Elizabeth, Duchess of Kingston, tried before her peers on a charge of bigamy, with the strawberry-leaves and the great Kingston estates on the one hand, and on the other ignominy, impoverishment, being branded in the hand by the executioner's iron as a common felon?

Into that hand King George II. had once dropped a fairing, when gallant king and envied maid of honour, with a whole court, had been playing the rustics, not unsuitably so far as coarseness of mind and manners

beneath the tissues and brocades, went,—
at a village fair.

There was a belle, a toast, and a coquette of the first water, who had lorded it in her *beauté de diable* for her short day, whose red and white flesh and sparkling eyes, her airs, vices, and follies, had ruled shamefully in London, at Bath, and latterly had been presented with their patent of nobility at foreign courts, in order to bring England still farther into evil repute.

There was the “Lady Kitty Crocodile” of Foote’s burlesque, on which she had got the Lord Chamberlain to put an interdict; “the modern Moll Flanders” of drawing-room talk and letter-writing, which were beyond the Lord Chamberlain’s ban.

She had few friends and one deadly enemy, ten times more deadly than any “Meadows” of all the lawful heirs of the late Duke of Kingston.

That enemy was the gross and brutal bully the Earl of Bristol, to whom in a moment of weakness, half a lifetime pre-

viously, Elizabeth Chudleigh had placed herself in subjection. He had dogged her footsteps ever since, not in love, but hate, helped to blast her reputation by the foulest accusations, and was now in league with her declared foes to accomplish her ruin, and to trumpet her disgrace as far as her infamous fame.

The Duchess of Kingston had carried that fame to Rome, where she had sought as a great English "Miladi," rich and powerful like a princess, with the wrecks of her imperial beauty, and the tradition of having had the world at her feet, to make a glorious penitent, worthy of a council of popes and cardinals.

But the penitent was restless, and she had borne her name and the rumour of her deeds still farther—to St. Petersburg, where she had become a congenial associate of the great northern she-bear.

Lady Bell was wild to see the trial, as were many modest women of the London of her day. But to few of these women could

the trial have had the ghastly fascination which it held for Lady Bell. Was it not her own story reproduced and acted out to its bitter end? In Elizabeth Chudleigh could not Lady Bell see and shudder at what she herself might become?

In the Admiral, Lord Bristol, who had been simple Lieutenant Hervey when he had wedded young Miss Chudleigh down in the country, could Lady Bell fail to recognise Captain Fane?

Ah ! yes, Harry Fane might be lost to her for ever,—might disown her for some reason of his own unknown to her,—might kill her by forsaking her without a word ; but she would never believe that his future contained the loathsome wickedness and debasement which foamed out its mire and dirt, and trafficked in its own infamy with Augustus, Earl of Bristol.

Westminster Hall was crowded for four days with the cream of good company. Peers and peeresses filled the interior, from the queen's box to the farthest back bench.

The biggest wigs of lawyers, in addition to the authorities engaged by the two sides in the case, thronged to hear the contest.

Nothing had been seen or heard like this trial, every one who was there said, since the Jacobite trials of Lords Kilmarnock and Balmerino, for the trials of Lord Byron and Earl Ferrars, which came between, were here fairly eclipsed.

Eating and drinking and sleeping ceased to be thought of, when lazy men and delicate women faced the hooting, groaning populace without, pushed their way to seats by right of favour as early as seven o'clock in the morning, and were still to be found in their places fasting and ready to drop, but alert and curious to the last, at seven o'clock at night.

Lady Bell was at her post all the four days, so engrossed by the principal performers that she could hardly spare attention for the superb company.

Only now and then, at any crisis in the examination, Lady Bell cast a frightened,

searching look around her to try if she could detect another spectator and listener, who ought to be as impressed as herself.

But when every foot of ground had its owner, and the lobbies and passages were crammed till they presented one living mass, it was almost impossible to distinguish individuals.

Lady Bell drew a long breath when she saw the miserable heroine of the day, followed by her attendant women, walk in under the custody of a gentleman of the black rod. She was a tall woman, large in every way, wearing the deep black of a professed widow, which enhanced the heavy pallor of her complexion, unrelieved on this occasion by rouge. She retained hardly a trace of the beauty which had once turned so many heads. She curtseyed quietly to her peers and judges, and conducted herself "for once," people said, with decent reticence, though there was no absence of the boldness, which had grown brazen. She might be a modern "Moll Flanders" and

a fair actress of a certain sort; she was certainly not so honest a woman as either Nan Clarges or Lavinia Fenton, who had both worn the strawberry leaves before her.

The pseudo Duchess of Kingston read her own plea of "not guilty," prolonging it into a daring casuistic speech of some length that had been put into her mouth. In her speech she declined to come to particulars, and only maintained the warrant for her marriage with the Duke of Kingston in the sentence of freedom to marry procured by her own evidence on oath, from the ecclesiastical council.

The Duchess sat down. The Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General, Harris, Dunning, Calvert, Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice de Grey took up the tale and argued its merits learnedly for two days.

When the peers had arrived at the point of not knowing whether the head or the tail of the case was uppermost, or indeed which

was the head and which the tail, what the duchess or countess had done, and what an ecclesiastical court could do and could not do, the witnesses were called.

Lady Bell heard all the witnesses with itching, ringing ears, from the elderly waiting-maid who was only too eager to deliver her destructive testimony, and who had to confess that she was bought over by the enemy, to the confidential friend among the peers who stood out like a Quixote on his privileges as a man of honour and gentleman to be absolved from repeating a private conversation, which, when he was compelled to repeat it, proved to be nothing to the purpose.

Lady Bell leant her head on her hand and listened with a weary throb of recognition to many of the details. She heard of the short acquaintance which had ripened rankly into marriage. She was told of the ceremony celebrated just before the bridegroom joined his ship to sail for the East Indies. She had the details of the humble

country church, where the hurried wedding took place before as small a company as possible.

Indeed, Miss Chudleigh's and Mr. Hervey's marriage had been literally a dark deed, for the time chosen for its celebration had been night, with the sole light that of a candle stuck in a gentleman's hat. In her quaking and revolt at the familiar particulars, Lady Bell gave a little hysterical giggle at that ridiculous episode.

The foolish revisiting of the scene of the marriage, and the tearing of the leaf in the parish register by the violent woman who was to profit by the unlawful act, was finally set forth. (Had any erasure or abstraction been attempted in or from the parish register at Islington, or were such acts of effrontery and recklessness always left for the woman to commit, Lady Bell wondered dully ?)

At last the long four days were over. The Duchess, or the criminal, had again risen to read out her defence in her un-

daunted, measured tones, lasting for three-quarters of an hour. If she had been culpable, she pled, who was to blame for the culpability? Who but the members of the ecclesiastical court (before which she had sworn that she had not married Lieutenant Hervey)! In accordance with the sentence of that court the unoffending Duchess had been, as she declared boldly, “beguiled by false lights hung out to allure the ignorant into paths of destruction.”

The Lord High Steward put the vote of guilty or not guilty to each peer in turn. The votes were counted, and amidst a strain of expectation and a silence which could be felt, unbroken by a rustle or whisper in the great crowded hall, the Lord High Steward pronounced the just sentence of “guilty.”

Elizabeth Hervey, no longer Duchess of Kingston, but Countess of Bristol, neither screamed nor fainted; but before the shock of the sentence had subsided to any other person present, rose nimbly, and glibly and

unblushingly claimed what still remained to her, a peeress's privilege of exception from the corporal punishment in the brand of the crime on the right hand of the Countess of Bristol.

While the judges wrangled anew over the fresh question whether the favour belonged to peers alone, or could be extended to peeresses, and the worn-out audience interchanged exclamations and comments, another woman asserted her right to a woman's weakness, by falling down in a dead faint on the floor of the Hall.

"A lady swooned," was an announcement which had been so common and sounded so natural in the circumstances, that it excited little commotion beyond the inevitable forcing of a way by which the senseless woman could be carried out to freer air and space, in order to be restored to life.

The light, slender figure in the general white satin dress of the younger ladies,

had been tacked on, as it were, to a large party, to which she did not belong particularly, and had been a somewhat isolated and solitary spectatress and auditress during the whole of the days' proceedings. Accordingly, there was nobody near who was so keenly interested as to fall into a fit of consternation at her sudden indisposition.

This was a lady who had never been missing from her corner since the trial began. She had rashly exposed herself to fatigue which the strongest man could with difficulty sustain. There was no wonder that her strength gave way in the end.

"The lady in the corner," while she sought a secluded position at the trial, was necessarily known to many people present, amongst them to one gentleman who had been leaning against the nearest doorway, and who simply moved aside to permit her exit, and to a group of gentlemen beyond him, who, less reticent, proclaimed the sufferer's identity.

"The frolicsome widow, without her

gossip, the wife of Bath," remarked the leader of the group; "the female Damon minus the female Pythias. Behold the result! One charming sinner can't stand alone, but is knocked down with a feather. What special sympathy with Moll Flanders's past, present, or prospective, has turned my Lady Bell so white about the gills? There was word of some obscure kinsman, but that was so long ago, that, gad, she may have gone in for half-a-dozen husbands since then."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN AFTERNOON IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

LONDON was in the white heat of July. So much of the world as then went out of town for more than John Gilpin's day, had betaken itself to country quarters, though these were thought far enough off in the villages of Twickenham, Richmond, Hackney, or Croydon.

But Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell stayed on in their baked and burned-up lodgings in the Haymarket, as if the women were become impervious to thick dust, sultry air, and brooding skies.

Yet these were the very women who had learnt to love well green fields, flowery lawns, blossoming or fruit-laden orchards,

the first song of the thrush, the last note of the robin. A greedy attraction overpowered the innocent, rural delights, and a tremendous misfortune had crushed the desire for them, with all other desires, out of these sensitive hearts.

In the absence of "society," and the knowledge that his days with his friends in England were numbered—for the transport with the contingent of Master Charles's regiment was to sail in a week—the two poor women and their friend clung to each other more fondly and wistfully than ever.

Master Charles went with the ladies one fine afternoon to walk in Kensington Gardens, when for the last time Mrs. Sundon withdrew from her companions, and turned aside to sit down on a bench by a wretched-looking woman carrying a sick child in rags, and to enter into engrossing conversation with her.

Mrs. Sundon might be a female Vincent de Paul, proposing to found a society for the

relief of every sufferer in London, to judge by her absorption.

Master Charles and Lady Bell were more restricted in their philanthropy; they were full of their companion. They could no longer look each other in the face, and deny her odd ways; whether some great enterprise and scheme of mercy were at their root, or whether they were but signs of the breaking up of the foundations, and the mental wreck of the woman.

Master Charles held the first view. "She is going to come out in still truer colours," he maintained with tender fanaticism to Lady Bell. "You remember how she put herself out of her way, and would have braved ridicule and blame, to interpose in my behalf. I think if I had not passed her my word not to game, I should have seen her grand sweet face appear some night among the reeking faces round the card-table, bidding me and my companions forbear. She is seeking to save the lost, somehow and somewhere. She is

only more indifferent to the self-sacrifice which she is making more complete."

Lady Bell rather inclined to the latter and more miserable view. Under her own smiling restlessness, or her apathy, her endless quips and cranks, or her listlessness, Lady Bell felt her heart "was broke." She knew that she had done very wrong more than once in her life, and that she was paying the forfeit. She had left her husband when she was a girl-wife, and after she had lived to be a woman she had been given over to a strong delusion, to put herself in the power of a husband who had in turn abandoned her.

So how could Lady Bell hope the best, and refuse to believe in wrong and misery because it was too bad for belief?

"I shall stand by Sunny to the last," Lady Bell told Master Charles, "though I think she is ceasing to care for me. She hardly listens to what I say when we are abroad together, or during meals; as for any other time at home, she is shut up

about her own business, with which nobody must meddle; but which brings the strangest characters more and more about her."

"Do they follow her to her lodgings now?" inquired Master Charles anxiously.

"On the night of the assault upon the watch-house in Moorfields," communicated Lady Bell, "I passed two rough men in dreadnoughts on our stairs, and I saw by the lamp the gleam of the cutlasses with which those other desperate characters that wounded the watchmen and rescued the prisoners, were armed. God knows what possesses Sunny, what she has done, or means to do. But I shall be lost indeed if I lose her, when you are gone to the wars, from which men never come back—no, never as they went, I mean. Their bodies may return, and their spirits too, for that matter; but they are not the same men—oh, far from it." Lady Bell shook her head with the sombre wisdom of experience.

“I swear that you will find me the same,” volunteered Master Charles with vehement confidence.

“You need not tell me that,” Lady Bell contradicted the speaker quite indignantly; “I cannot believe it, sir, not in the least. I say that I have seen men as good change so utterly, that their nearest and dearest would never have known them again. There is no occasion to be offended, Master Charles,” continued Lady Bell more lightly; “think of the reverses, the accidents in life, think what weak creatures we are. Pooh! you may arrive at home to find me grown as fat as Miss Kingscote, or become a nun, or turned a farmer, or joined the ‘Blues,’ and writing a book in Grub Street.”

“It is more likely that I shall hear of you as Lady Bell—something else than Trevor.” Master Charles really felt flat, and was not in spirits for nonsense, but he rallied to make the remark which might be expected from him. “You will have owned a master, and be following his lead.”

“You will sooner hear of me in my grave,” said Lady Bell with such abrupt earnestness that he started and looked at her.

Was this other friend, only less dear to Master Charles than Mrs. Sundon—this girl who was like a sister to him, struggling in toils of her own—dreading to perish in his absence?

Lady Bell saw the impression which she had made, and was quick in trying to smile it away. “Don’t mind me, Master Charles,” she recommended to him, “you know I talk a great deal of random chatter,—I always did. You have enough troubles, poor fellow, without being additionally burdened by my fancies. Girls have no end of fancies. Sure, I am pure well, only moping at odd moments for the town being full again, and the breezes blowing fresher, and these sere leaves,” catching at a prematurely dried and cracking cluster, “being stained an honest brown.”

“I know that you used to wish time

would fly faster, and the months run on," Master Charles reminded her.

"Oh! I was a little fool," she cried, "the greatest little fool in the world. I did not know what the months were running on to—to make me a withered old woman, Master Charles, and you a stiff old veteran, perhaps walking lame, or wheezing with an Indian swamp cough. But let us turn to the opposite extreme. Do you remember how we plucked flowers, and collected feathers, and scrambled up banks and skipped down again, and sang and danced at dear old Nutfield and Summerhill? My youth was spent there, and I have alway that season to be thankful for."

Although she was laughing, tears which sprung up more easily and were harder to force down now than formerly, shone in her eyes. He was struck with what he had been previously blind to.

Lady Bell's pale, dark-eyed beauty was paler and darker-eyed than it had ever been before, for the paleness verged on wanness,

and the soft gloom of the eyes was increased till it shadowed the whole face. There was less of the little figure than there used to be. The small bones of the wrist and elbow, where she had pulled off one long glove for coolness, the collar-bones under her neckerchief, had become prominent.

Lady Bell was falling away in flesh far more than Mrs. Sundon had fallen away. For that matter, Mrs. Sundon had the magnificent framework of a woman magnificent in constitution, as in everything else. But a small being like Lady Bell, if she took to vanishing, might soon be a sprite altogether, with her cast-off bones deposited in church-yard soil, as she foreboded.

Master Charles sighed heavily, with the conviction that the whole world was out of joint, and he was bound for the wars, leaving these dear and tender women to fear and fail as they might, without him.

Lady Bell had been simply walking by Master Charles's side. He proceeded to

draw her arm through his, in the pain and consternation of the conviction that the merry charming girl, of whom he had been fond in an honest, manly way, was growing weak and weary.

“Lean on me, dear Lady Bell,” he charged her, thinking farther, “Take what good you can of me while you have me. It is little that I can do for you, but you are heartily welcome to that little, before I am far away.”

There was just a sprinkling of company in the Gardens, and that sprinkling hovered near the many-windowed red palace, with its red sentinels, or took refuge by the water.

There was the great stillness about, which sometimes descends on the world in the full blaze of a summer afternoon, when the birds, with nothing more to hope for in the perfection of the year, have given over singing for the season; and all life besides, even the young human life of streets and suburbs, is for once tired out, and fain to be quiet.

The glow of the sun was well shut out in the side avenue which Lady Bell and Master Charles were traversing.

Those were still grand old elm trees, which had shaken their bold boughs over earlier generations and former reigns. Lady Bell had cast a stigma on their parched and scorched leaves, showing many an untimely, sickly or dead, straw or ash-coloured tint, in the prevailing dusky summer green.

But few free and fresh country trees in dewy meadows and hedgerows afforded more grateful shade, or interlaced their boughs into such welcome aisles, as these faithful guardians of the old palace park in the old court suburb.

The turf below was as soft as velvet in its olive moss. It was pleasant to recall what brave men and fair women had trodden that turf and walked beneath these trees.

At this moment Lady Bell and Master Charles formed a couple not unsuitable to the locality. They might represent a pair

of lovers, or a young husband and wife. In either light they looked a picture of fearless confidence and trustful rest, while they passed tranquilly along, as it were too happy to speak—so happy, that happiness in its entire fulfilment waxed dumb, and borrowed a shade of pensiveness.

Lady Bell and Master Charles were altogether unlike the young couple who stole out secretly, and met under the bleak spring skies and the bare boughs of the Mall at St. James's, wild with agitation, to confess their love and cling to each other ere they parted for months, and years, or for ever, sobbing the one moment, laughing the next, not daring to give themselves time to think, to look grave, to draw back before they rushed to bind themselves to each other by a tie which only death could break.

Master Charles and Lady Bell were like lovers in a dream, treading there so peacefully and contentedly; and like the mad nightmare into which a quiet dream sometimes breaks, came the catastrophe.

CHAPTER XV.

A HAT TOSSED OFF.—LADY BELL PICKS UP
A GAUNTLET.

AS the couple in their promenade rounded a clump of trees, a gentleman advancing in the opposite direction met them unexpectedly face to face, took in at a glance their whole aspect, and could no longer resist the devil in him, as he had resisted it in former temptations.

In an instant a gloomy face became black as night with jealousy, rage, and hatred. The next moment the new-comer did what sounds a small and silly thing, but what was in fact ominous enough—he stepped a foot nearer, snatched Master Charles's laced hat from his head, and flung it among the trees.

Master Charles was in such sheer amazement that he stood thunderstruck. His brown hair was slightly matted about the flushed forehead and youthful face, before he shook it back and broke out into a passionate oath : “ Man, if you are not mad, you shall answer for this. What do you mean by such a monstrous insult—before a lady, too ? ”

“ I shall be rejoiced to answer for the insult, and to tell you my meaning, if indeed that is necessary, behind the lady’s back, Ensign Kingscote,” answered Harry Fane with an ugly grin, which showed his teeth.

Lady Bell had not screamed at first, or hastened to interpose between the men. She had merely dropped the arm which Master Charles had given her, and remained riveted to the spot. But she screamed now with a sharp ringing cry, as if it were she who was to suffer the shooting or stabbing for which this tossing off of the hat paved the way.

She stretched out her arms as if she would, with their feeble help, ward off blows, and she appealed piteously to Master Charles.

“Don’t mind him, he is mad—he has been mad for long—let him do what he will ; come with me.” And she ran aside, picked up Master Charles’s hat, and held it out to him imploringly, while Captain Fane looked on savagely, and misunderstood every word and act.

His mind in a flash drew the falsest comparison between Lady Bell in Kensington Gardens and “wanton Shrewsbury” among the trees of Cleveden ; and he said to himself, that in order to make the analogy complete, it was a pity Shrewsbury’s successor did not have a horse to hold for this fellow, while another horribly injured husband’s blood was shed. But, by Heaven ! he should shed his blood dearly, and put his mark on this lad, only less miserable than himself.

“No, no, Lady Bell.” Master Charles

put aside her petition with rough freedom in his hot resentment. "It may be mighty fine what you know in excuse for this villain, but I cannot listen to it; my honour as a gentleman and soldier is concerned. You must leave me to settle my own account."

"There are two of us desiring the settlement," remarked Captain Fane grimly, beginning, however, to recover from his fit of blind fury. "But we may as well transact the business regularly," he said, with swift scorn of himself, added to the sickening scorn, in alternation with the fierce wrath, which he felt against the pair before him; "we need not make an uproar, and we may dispense with either a park-keeper's or a lady's presence."

Harry Fane was again striving to put that curb upon himself, which even on a bitterly shameful extremity might be demanded of a man of sense and discipline, half-a-dozen years older than the beardless, swaggering boy whom a light woman in

her idle folly had preferred to her husband, and had vilely put in his place.

Harry Fane forced himself briefly to defer his vengeance, and to go through the form of raising his hat and offering his card to Master Charles, still swelling and stuttering with astounded indignation, while Captain Fane pledged himself that he would be at home to receive any messenger on Mr. Kingscote's part for the next twenty-four hours.

But Lady Bell had not withdrawn, as Master Charles had bidden her, from an encounter with which she could not cope, tending on a discussion which was not within a woman's province, though like many a woman in a similar case, she was at the bottom of the mischief. She continued close by, a determined and desperate witness of all that passed.

Lady Bell had been foiled in her appeal to her friend. She had no resource but to address her former lover and husband. She must ask mercy from the man at whose

hands she had not sought justice, whose treatment of her, so far as she could see, had been dastardly and cruel beyond comprehension, unless she would be the death of her innocent, manly friend and brother, Master Charles.

At that moment Lady Bell had so great a pity for Master Charles's youth and manliness, for the hopes that she knew had been set upon him down at Nutfield and Lumley (where everybody had been kind to her, and where she had been so happy, as she had said lately, during a season), for all that Master Charles was to the simple, homely soul, his sister, who had sheltered and petted Lady Bell, that she did not seem to grudge the utmost that she could do in his service.

Lady Bell stepped into the breach like Mrs. Sundon, from whom they had strayed into such harm. Lady Bell, too, could put aside her wrongs and sorrows for a space. She was perfectly calm, though deadly white, when she spoke to Harry Fane.

“Captain Fane,” she said, “I have held my tongue till now, when I must speak to prevent murder. Yes, it will be murder without provocation or reason, if you go out and fight Master Charles, with whom you have no quarrel, except that he has always been my friend. Wreak your vengeance on me, since I have monstrously offended you; but spare him. He is his sister’s only brother; he is the young Squire of Nutfield, who is to restore his father’s house.”

“I have nothing to do with that,” growled Harry Fane.

“Have done, or I shall never forgive you, Lady Bell,” fumed Master Charles in one breath.

But she had not done. “I know that,” she went on, addressing Harry Fane; “but you see how young he is, in the first flush of life, going to the wars in search of fortune and glory, but it may only be to win an honourable grave. Need you anticipate the last? You are years older, Harry

Fane, and you know as well as I do what life brings. I dare say it would be no more than kindness to cut short this life, but have you the heart to do it?"

She looked up in his face for the first time since she had spoken. Then she shut her eyes, and staggered back to a full consciousness of her own misery. She could not bear to see the agony of condemnation and reproach in the set face, or to look on the features which, irregular and weather-beaten as they were, she had learned to think the model of manly beauty, and to call her Harry's traits. These were written on her heart, even to the knit of the brow and the trick of the lip, and they filled her with a piteous, vain yearning for the dear face to be turned kindly on her once more.

Thus the living, visited by a dream-phantom, or by the chance resemblance of a passer-by, yearn for the dead restored to life again—to see, to hear, and to hold as of old in a loving embrace.

“ You plead well, Lady Bell, if you were

not pleading to me," was wrung from Harry Fane.

"I will have no more pleading for me, Lady Bell," cried Master Charles, as bewildered as ever in his rage; only clear that he would not be defended by Lady Bell, or by any other.

And she pled no more for him. She had literally lost sight of Master Charles and all that concerned him, in that fleeting glance at Harry Fane's face, which had rolled back the tide of feeling and recollection to the time when he loved her, and was mad to marry her. It was to save Harry Fane from a desperate deed and a long remorse, that she was fain at last to humble herself in the dust before him.

"Oh Harry, Harry,"—she pressed up to her husband, whispering, but in accents which Master Charles could still catch, marvelling, and recoiling petrified,—“am I worthy of such a sacrifice? Could you not let me go, believing, at least, that I shall not willingly cross your path? Do

not stain your hands and conscience for me. Do not slay or be slain on my wretched account. Live to forget me, whatever I have cost you—to be a gallant officer and the good man in a wicked world that I believed you.”

“You tell me plainly that you do not deserve that this gentleman and I should fight for you,” he exclaimed, putting his own merciless construction on her unwitting words, and writhing as he did it.

“Yes, yes,” she assured him eagerly, thinking as she spoke of “errors, not crimes ;” of her rebellion and flight from Squire Trevor ; of the compromising rashness, the setting at naught of her friends, in her second marriage. “I have been a proud, selfish girl, and see what has come of it. You used not to approve of duelling ; you called it a barbarous practice. You said it was a rude remnant of savage violence, that wanted being put an end to. You agreed that there might be greater courage in declining, than in consenting to

fight a duel. I recollect what others will recollect also. Will you give the lie to the whole tenor of your life, after what I have said to you?"

"No more," Harry Fane charged her, turning away; "you are right here. Mr. Kingscote, the matter rests with you; but if this will serve your turn, I say I am sorry that I have troubled you and myself in this miserable affair." He was gone without another word or look.

"Lady Bell, you must explain yourself, and this scene, which is altogether unaccountable," Master Charles said at last, hardly knowing what he said or what to think at the end, any more than at the beginning. "Shall I follow the fellow, and knock him down, after all, though for the life of me I cannot tell what ails him?"

"Knock him down, Master Charles!" cried Lady Bell with an odd laugh, which tingled through the lad's nerves. "I should like to see you do that! You must measure yourself with fitter adversaries.

You may be another little David, but you can never conquer this Goliath. He is beside himself, but he is worth us all ten times over; do you hear that? I say it. He is a true and noble gentleman, only beside himself?"

"He ought not to be at large," objected Master Charles doggedly; and then he thought himself justified in insisting, "But what has made him beside himself, and what have you to do with him?"

"Oh, never mind that now, Master Charles," sighed Lady Bell, putting her hand on her breast to stay the fluttering at her heart. "It is a long story—do I owe it you? I cannot tell. Spare me at present, Master Charles; oh! do you spare me. Let us return to Sunny, and say nothing of this encounter, till I have time to think and make up my mind."

CHAPTER XVI.

MASTER CHARLES PAYS A FORMAL VISIT.

MASTER CHARLES was reduced to the lowest ebb of doubt and distraction regarding his friends. He complied so far with Lady Bell's petition, coinciding as it did with his own instinct, not to add inconsiderately to Mrs. Sundon's tribulation by the tale he had to tell.

Master Charles tried to get an interview with Lady Bell next morning, for the purpose of inducing her to confide in him ; but Lady Bell pleaded what might very well be a real obstacle—indisposition.

He was aware, too, that though he had her in a *tête-à-tête*, it might be to no purpose. He knew of old how she could,

when she would, go off at a tangent, vindicating the prerogatives of her sex and rank, when, her dignity being equal to her softness, wild horses, metaphorically speaking, could not draw a secret from Lady Bell.

But a young woman like Lady Bell ought not to be left to herself. She should have a friend to act for her, whether this mad fellow, who had been in plain clothes, but whose name it struck Master Charles, on reflection, was the same as that of the naval captain who had brought home an American prize a month back, were some unacknowledged connection by blood of the late Earl of Etheredge's, or whether he held and abused some power over Lady Bell. She should have a friend to act for her, Master Charles decided, becoming absolutely fatherly in his brotherliness.

Master Charles cudgelled his generous, honest young brains, and arrived at a conclusion worthy of them.

Master Charles returned from his fruitless attempt at seeing Lady Bell, and dis-

covering from her on what pretence a man whom she still professed to hold in honour could, unless he were mad indeed, come up and grossly insult her companion, simply because he was her companion, in a public place, and after she had succeeded in preventing the inevitable consequences, could leave her with a parting taunt as to her share in the quarrel.

Master Charles repaired to a coffee-house, dined there, and was particular in making his afternoon toilette.

In those days soldiers and sailors went abroad under their respective colours. Master Charles saw that his uniform, his hair, his gloves, and square-toed shoes were in proper punctilious order.

He first studied a card which he had in his pocket, and then he sallied forth, ruffling out his cravat and frills, and twirling his cane with a certain self-satisfaction, but not so much like a military fopling as in the character of a man whose mind is made up to the fairest alternative.

Master Charles's destination was Captain Fane's lodgings in Red Lion Square, Holborn, next door to the house of Mr. John Harrison, who had received a grant from Parliament for constructing time-keepers so as to ascertain longitude and latitude.

Master Charles was bound for the braving of Lady Bell's madman—not to assault him at a disadvantage—not even to carry him a cartel, since by the laws of duelling a principal in a duel could not convey his own challenge.

Master Charles was on his way to offer and require statements which might demolish an ugly brood of mistakes. But if not, and if called on to inflict punishment, Master Charles would not be found wanting, however ineffectual Lady Bell had counted him, as a dealer of retribution, and with his arm nerved by a righteous cause, as well as by his own vigorous young thews and sinews, he should dispense summary justice where it was due.

Such a course was well-nigh impossible to a guilty man, however high-spirited, or however arch a hypocrite. It was only likely to suggest itself to a pure-minded gentleman, and to a young fellow of sense, as well as virtue, whose nature was open and honourable, and who feared no inspection either of his motives or his actions. Moreover, it was a line of conduct which would hardly have been practicable to a man in the least degree overbalanced by passion, who could not take the whole circumstances, and his relation to them, into calm consideration.

This reasoning was so patent, that when Master Charles, declining to send in his name beforehand, was shown as "a gentleman on business" into the parlour where Harry Fane was sitting, sternly applying himself to some scientific data, even Harry Fane, possessed and besotted as he was, felt for a second staggered in his convictions.

But there is such a rare thing as "unparalleled audacity," and Harry Fane was

under widely different influences from those which guided Master Charles.

Harry Fane could not succeed in striking out every gleam of light from a mind naturally open to light; but the bare sight of the dashing, blooming young soldier caused Harry's blood to boil, and sent it in a tumultuous, overpowering rush to his brain.

"I thought that we had done with each other, sir," quoth Harry as he rose, glaring and snarling at his visitor; "but if you are of a different opinion, I am with you. No abstract theory of duelling need apply to an exceptional case. I am ready to meet you here with locked doors and our swords, or with pistols across the table, as you choose."

"Good God!" protested Master Charles, with the freshest surprise and indignation, "what have I done, or what do you think I have done, that you should be ready for us to butcher each other in this fashion? I did not come here for butchery."

"Did Lady Bell"—with all his efforts

Harry Fane could not keep his voice under entire control when he spoke her name—"send you to me?" he demanded sharply.

"Lady Bell Trevor knows nothing of my being here, where I came to tell my story and to hear yours, sir," retorted Master Charles, with the sedate dignity and authority of an aspersed man seeking to clear himself.

"The stories will reflect prodigious credit on Lady Bell *Trevor*," said Captain Fane bitterly, with an emphasis on the proper name which was a profound mystery to Master Charles. But he would not let himself be disturbed or turned from his intention by the invidious accent, whether or not it might prove the saturnine naval officer stark mad or the victim of some extraordinary imposture, or in an unexplained way connected with Lady Bell through her late husband, instead of through her father, the deceased earl.

"You shall hear me and then come to a decision," Master Charles said, perhaps

with a little exasperating tone of dictation, wariness, and soothing in his voice. For Captain Fane flew up, breathing fire and smoke more furiously than ever.

“Upon my soul, I don’t know why I should hear you, Mr. Kingscote,” he cried, rapidly losing his self-restraint. “Let me tell you what common decency might have told you, that though I don’t think it worth while to revenge myself by inflicting proper chastisement upon you, after what I heard, still your presence here is so insolent and intolerable an intrusion, so outrageous an insult, that it may end in my not being able to help ridding myself of your presence by throwing you out of the window. Remember, sir, there is no miserable woman here to get you spared by her own degradation.”

“Inflict proper chastisement ! Throw me out of the window ! Lady Bell degrading herself to spare me !” panted Master Charles with a flush. At the same time he stepped back in open-mouthed consternation at the height of the madness

of the full-grown, powerful man whose superiority Lady Bell had vouched for, and who was yet at large and holding a commission in His Majesty's navy, so much to the purpose that a recent *Gazette* had chronicled, with a flourish which Master Charles recollected to have read with envy, Captain Fane's distinguished capture of a frigate from the enemy.

But Master Charles rallied like a brave young fellow from the shock of the compromising violence, and reverted faithfully to the upright, rational design with which he had come.

"Do you know to whom or of whom you are speaking, Captain Fane?" he asked gravely. "At least hear me (the greatest offender has a right to be heard), though it may be of no use, and then speak of throwing me out of the window."

In a frenzy as Harry Fane was, the courageous single-heartedness of the lad made its way.

"Say what you have got to say," Harry

yielded angrily and with a heavy sigh, standing up against the window-shutter, "and be quick about it, for I cannot answer for myself. I have shown you beforehand that your words are of no moment to me; but have them out, and let us be quit of each other in one way or another. For my part, sir, I desire never to see your face again."

Master Charles cleared his throat formally, and rested his hand on the back of a chair.

"It has been a pride and pleasure to me," began the young fellow, "to be of the least use or service to two ladies for whom I have so deep a reverence, so high a regard, as that which I feel for Lady Bell Trevor and her friend, Mrs. Sundon."

"A truce to your abominable affectation and hypocrisy." Harry Fane ground the words through his teeth.

Master Charles paid no heed. He was bent on going through with his task.

"I knew Lady Bell first. Indeed she

lived in our house—with my sister and me, I mean—for many months. She had gone away when she was a mere girl from her home, after some quarrel with old Squire Trevor, to whom her friends had married her so unsuitably, and she fell in, when travelling, with the great actress, Mrs. Sidons. I daresay you have heard so much, and can follow me," broke off Master Charles, having an irresistible desire to ascertain how far he was impressing his listener.

Captain Fane merely nodded sulkily. Something of this Lady Bell had told him, and the old story, with its indiscretion and simplicity, and even its slight fantasticalness, bringing up the old figure of the woman with whom he had fallen so madly in love, somehow shook his conviction of her untruth.

Oh, the drivelling folly of the doubt when he had returned so soon to find her levity the disgraceful theme in every mouth, to hear her talked of as the widow whose giddy, froward pranks were common pro-

perty—and she no widow, but the new-made wife of a man absent, exposed to danger and death, a woman whose peculiar circumstances ought to have detained her in the strictest seclusion, or taught her the most heedful carefulness in society.

After what his own eyes had seen of her and his own ears heard her tongue admit, what could she be but the fine lady deeply tainted, nay, engrained with evil?

She had been so greedy of conquest that she had even angled for the admiration of a poor, plain man, who had earned undeservedly the reputation of being a philosopher; and when she had fooled him to the top of her bent, her end was served, to his life-long dishonour and misery.

“Mrs. Siddons recommended Lady Bell as a companion to my sister. Lady Bell was then passing under the name of Miss or Mrs. Barlowe,” explained Master Charles, with anxious elaboration, “as a better protection against any pursuit from her husband, and she was glad to stop and be out of the

way at Nutfield. It was a mutual benefit for her to be with us," declared Master Charles, with the most perfect transparency in his off-handedness. "We grew as fond of her as possible before we had a notion that she was a woman of quality—of title at least. She was so gracious and obliging, so ready to be amused. She would teach me as well as Deb all sorts of things—games and dances. We were like brother and sister."

Was the relation artfully suggested? It did not sound so.

"Then Mrs. Sundon came to Nutfield for summer quarters." Here Master Charles manifestly faltered, bent his head, coloured to the temples, and was forced to pause for an instant. When he spoke again it was with indignant haughtiness.

"There is no need to bring into our conversation the name of the best and most unfortunate of women, whose misfortunes should throw a shield over her, as her virtues shed a halo round her, except to

say that she had known Lady Bell before, and immediately recognised her, and that when Squire Trevor's death set Lady Bell free, and enabled her to cast aside all disguise, she and Mrs. Sundon took up house together at Summerhill, near Nutfield, and still did me the honour of calling me their friend. Poor generous, gentle souls ! a man may wonder at their still being able to trust in him," Master Charles could not help exclaiming in a paroxysm of compassion and wrath, "after what they have suffered from men. But stay, I cannot hear myself speak ; what is the uproar without ?" cried Master Charles, coming to a dead stop, forced to give way to a sudden tumult and clatter of many feet, with the hubbub of many voices in the street below.

As the noise continued and the strong rush of passers-by did not abate, Captain Fane flung up the window at his side.

In immediate response to the action several voices shouted up, "A gang of false coiners seized in a house in Holborn,

a gentleman of quality among them—the same that stabbed one of his own sort in a gambling-house brawl last year, and was thought to have been let slip beyond seas—one Mr. Sugden or Sutton, of a place in a midland county—a greater capture than that of the brothers Perreau.”

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ARREST AND A RESCUE.

MASTER CHARLES leapt up as if he had been shot. "Good Lord! what a strange coincidence!" A spasm passed across his face, leaving its fresh comeliness shocked and perturbed in every line.

He kept in the background, and yet looked out with an eager fascination when he and Harry Fane, as if by mutual consent, dropped their discussion for a moment, and stood ready to stare with the crowd, already packed and jostling each other for places in the line which the arrested gang would traverse.

The false coiners were on foot, walking in a file, handcuffed, and guarded by watch-

men and soldiers on their certain way to the gallows.

The men looked for the most part, whether hanging their heads, dead-beaten, or holding them up with effrontery, a set of dirty, ill-conditioned mechanics or dissolute tradesmen—with one single exception.

It was that of a man who had been wounded in the fray at the arrest, and was carried last in a chair. To those who could see into the chair there was presented a soiled and torn heap of velvet, cambric, and lace, belonging to a half recumbent figure, with the eyes closed, though the convulsive working of the muscles of the face was still perceptible. The features were not so stricken and wasted by debauchery and ruin as to be entirely deprived of their original signs of distinction and refinement.

Captain Fane looked out with a sternness that was callous in its hardness. These villains were worse than so many privateers or smugglers, inasmuch as the former prosecuted their base calling with comparative ease

and security, till they met their deserts by being snared like rats in a hole. And what had he to do with them or the depraved man of rank who was the chief criminal?

Lady Bell had been foolishly fond of that criminal's wife in the days when Sundon of Chevely was no worse than an idle, dissipated gentleman.

What, again, had Harry Fane to do with that? He was fast dismissing every appeal to his mercy in a similar fashion. His old benevolence, with his tolerance, seemed rapidly dying out of his poisoned moral nature. His own sorrow and wrong so possessed him, that, while it drove him to do a great wrong in return, it shut him in from farther sympathy with, and feeling for, his fellows.

Master Charles drew so deep a sigh it was almost an appalled sob. See! his successful rival. Here was what Mrs. Sundon's first love, her wedded husband, had come to.

The next moment Master Charles started

violently, clutched his hat, and sprang to the door.

“Stop, sir,” cried Harry Fane imperiously, “you have not ended the explanation which you volunteered. I shall not allow you to get off like this. What the devil is Sundon of Chevely’s arrest to you or me? I will have no paltering, no mocking me.”

“I cannot stay,” Master Charles looked round to shout. “You would not ask me if you had eyes in your head or a mind for anything but your own madly selfish delusions. If it had not been for you I should have been with my friends to advise and protect them from themselves this afternoon. Don’t you see she is there, and Lady Bell with her, in a coach, following him to Tothill Bridewell or to Newgate? My God! to think what she must have suffered, and what she is going to face!”

Down the stair flung Master Charles, followed close by Captain Fane, the two elbowing their way, the one more furiously

than the other, like a couple of madmen through the crowd, to the coach. Luckily for its pursuers, it was wedged in till it was all but stopped at this point of its progress.

Master Charles knew perfectly what he should say and do. He was about to implore, "let me go with you, Mrs. Sundon; I shall not presume, I shall not speak a word, I shall keep out of sight if you wish it—only let me be at hand to defend you, speak for you, if necessary, fetch and carry for you."

Captain Fane was but making up his mind in the whirl of one distracting moment, as he caught a glimpse of two pale, handsome young women, composed as became their order, even under this trying ordeal, though Lady Bell's eyes were swimming, and she had difficulty in keeping herself from swaying to and fro, with the weakness of recent indisposition.

Lady Bell had come away in so great a hurry to stand by her friend to the last, that

she had only time to throw a mantle over her *petite santé* dressing-gown. It was delirious in Lady Bell to go out in such a state of health, and if Mrs. Sundon had not been crazier than her friend she would not have permitted it.

To venture to Newgate, into the court, before the magistrates, into the vile common room with its vile company, if the gentlewomen could force their way thither, was rather worse than a descent into Hades to rescue from the infernal shades a Proserpine or a Eurydice.

To crown all, Lady Bell, who had heard and seen likenesses and caricatures of the infamous Mrs. Rudd in her high head-gear and fashionable dress, as she figured in the great Perreau case, was not at all sure whether she, Lady Bell, and Sunny, by identifying themselves with the wretched man before them, might not be regarded as accomplices, taken up, and tried on their own account.

Master Charles was first at the coach

window on his side, and put up his petition.

Mrs. Sundon saw and heard him, and turned to him. She altogether denied his request, where she herself was concerned ; but she denied it with a kind sense of its kindness, even in circumstances so supreme, and in the same breath she claimed a favour from him.

“No, my friend,” she said, “I know all that you would wish, but I can take no more from you. Forgive me that I have taken so much, and that without giving you my confidence. There is one relief in my misery to-day, that I can openly follow my falsely-accused husband. We have no farther discovery to fear, God help us. He is my own husband ; my own dear husband again, in the day of his sore distress. No, Master Charles, there is no man, however lost, who would be so heartless as to molest a poor woman waiting on her captured, injured husband. I do not fear it. But I have a charge for you. Take Lady Bell

away to some place of shelter, lead her safely home. I shall send to you there, Bell. I did not know what I was doing when I let you come. No, I tell you no, Bell; this is nobody's business save mine. There is only one person whom a woman is justified in following to prison."

"Ay, madam, and there is only one who may bid a woman follow him," interrupted Harry Fane roughly, pulling open the coach door, "and who may count on her obedience if she be an honest woman. Stand aside, sir, this is not your place," to Master Charles. To Mrs. Sundon—"You shall drive on, madam, in a moment, to your husband, and God help you" (with a little relenting in his voice), "but let Lady Bell *Fane* come to her husband when he calls upon her."

Lady Bell sat up straight, put up her trembling hands, tried to pass them over her eyes to clear her vision bodily and mentally, and could not, but lapsed more and more into the confusion and passion of a child.

She stretched out her hands longingly to him, gave a little quavering cry, like a child's—who does not know it?—when the child's mother has left her darling, and has stayed away long, but the child feels that it has found its mother again at last. “Harry, Harry, are you my Harry after all? Was it a dreadful dream? I thought you disowned me, that you had never cared for me. What a fool I must have been!”

None who heard the cry and the words from Lady Bell could doubt the substance of Captain Fane's assertion. And here was no time or place for searching into its origin, or into the footing on which the couple stood towards each other, for interfering between man and wife.

Mrs. Sundon cried bewildered, “What is this? Here is the officer whom we saw at the review, and I thought there was something in that encounter which I could not fathom. Has Bell stolen a march upon me, and been foolish?” Mrs. Sundon asked in fresh distress.

But Mrs. Sundon was losing a husband as Lady Bell was finding one. "See to this, Master Charles," Mrs. Sundon told her friend hastily. "I think I had once a suspicion of some troth-plight or alliance having been entered into by Lady Bell, but I have forgotten every interest save the nearest and most pressing, for a long time. Bell, Bell, why did you cheat me?" Mrs. Sundon uttered one piteous reproach. "But perhaps you could not help it, poor child, any more than I could help cheating you."

"No, Sunny, I did not mean to cheat you," said Lady Bell very simply and earnestly.

"Be kind to her, sir, whatever you are," Mrs. Sundon spoke to Captain Fane. "If you led her into a false position, you were the more bound to bear with her, and bring her safe out of it. If I ever see better days, I shall tell you why I left her to herself, and perhaps, as I begin to understand, betrayed her into the appearance of

evil. But I cannot think any more even of Bell, now. Captain Fane, as you are an officer and gentleman, and I am an unfortunate woman, Lady Bell's friend and natural guardian, you will make everything clear to Master Charles. He is a young man, but he is the old friend of both of us women. Now, farewell all; none of you needs me like Gregory Sundon, let me be gone to him." And she wrung her hands at the compulsory delay.

Lady Bell was in her husband's lodgings, standing with him there, and the door closed upon them. She had confirmed Captain Fane's avowal, and Master Charles had left them, fain to go to work on Mrs. Sundon's behalf.

Lady Bell knew where she was. She looked round, and her eye had taken in all the attributes and belongings, from the papers on the table to the sword in the corner.

Lady Bell was coming to herself, was remembering everything, was thinking—not

that this was a poor home, but that here was a poor welcome home. She was feeling shy and hurt with the soreness of her old wrongs. She was asking herself whether Harry had deserved to be instantaneously forgiven for his inexplicable, rude, atrocious behaviour to his wedded wife.

He was coming to himself. He was feeling awkward and vexed, reawakening to the rankling of undoubted injuries. He was not certain whether—though he had been in error in the main, God be thanked—he had not been too easily induced into seeming to condone the huge amount of provocation which he had actually received.

“If you had remained down in the country, where I believed you to be, all this lamentable misunderstanding would not have happened,” he said stiffly and pragmatically.

“I came up to town with my Mrs. Sundon,” replied Lady Bell shortly and dryly, seeing that she was put on her

defence. "I suppose you would have said that I was too young to keep house alone," and she looked at the hem of her handkerchief, not at him.

"Unquestionably," he rejoined quickly, "if you were to enter into familiar association, as with a brother, with a young fellow who is in fact no relation to you."

"Master Charles had been like a brother to me," said Lady Bell without the least flinching, and with a little ominous flash of her dark eyes. "I was very glad to be like a sister to him. Was I to anticipate offensive interpretation of friendship with a poor boy whose very admiration for Mrs. Sundon was as high and pure as if she had been a goddess seated among the stars?"

"In the society of others, where I know you would encounter temptation, you could not have been too discreet, for my sake as well as for your own," he persisted in his aggrieved tone.

"Hear him!" cried Lady Bell in the

liveliest indignation, appealing to Harry Fane against Harry Fane. "What did I do in society? One would think I had been next to wicked. I was easy and merry, like any other happy young married woman. If I had not married the man whom I believed the best in the world, whom I loved with my whole soul, then I might have studied discretion. I did study it when I was a wretched child, married to poor old Squire Trevor. Though he called me idle and silly, wilful and pert—and I warrant I was all that to a man who might have been my grandfather—still he never called me indiscreet. He left that to the ungenerous man who, when my heart was singing for joy because I was his, and he was mine, when I was wild with pride in the possession of my precious secret, expected me to be taking all manner of precaution against other men, who had ceased for ever to be anything save friends and brothers to me, and who were friends all the more for his sake."

She had him there with wonderful directness and completeness.

What ! her innocent, fond heart had sung for joy at belonging to a man who, knowing her so young, admired and exposed, had allowed his mind to be misled and abused by circumstances and by his own exacting passion, till he had treated like a dog the woman who had chosen him out of a thousand, and who had delighted to crown him—unworthy of her in all save the truth and love which had signally failed her—with the distinction of her unselfish, devoted regard !

“Bell,” he said sadly, taking her two hands in his, and looking her full in the face, “there is one thing that you must take into account before I try whether I can ever make you forget that I have behaved to you in my harsh intolerance like a villain. My one poor, miserable excuse is, that while you were Lady Bell, young, lovely, and charming to every eye besides

mine, the man whom you were so infatuated as to call the best of men, and to enrich with the treasure of your affection, was in his own more correct estimation, and in that of the world, at the best a gruff, fault-finding, disagreeable sinner, with no endowment of nature or fortune to account for the favour which you had shown him. With regard to such a man, it did not seem altogether unnatural, however disastrous to him and to you, that the favour should prove short-lived, and that he should be speedily discarded from the post which he was not particularly well qualified to fill."

"Don't talk prodigious nonsense of yourself, Harry," Lady Bell forbade him through her fast-falling tears. "You know you are the best and wisest of men, to whom a poor fluttering thing like me has to stand on tip-toe to look up. Only you lost your mind for a season. I believe it was all because we did very wrong about the private marriage of ours, which is private no longer,

and you have taken the most absurd, preposterous time to make it public—just like a man. But I am left on your hands, Harry Fane, and you can no longer disclaim me, if you would.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIFE'S CHEQUERS.

THE reappearance of Sundon of Chevely, with his wife standing by him once more, in the abyss into which he had sunk, followed as it was by his death in Newgate on the very first night of his imprisonment there, broke to the great world the shock and scandal of the proclamation of Lady Bell Fane's private marriage for these four months and more, to a poor naval officer, unknown save in his profession, and to a few dabblers in science.

The world held up its hands and shrugged its shoulders; but its emotions of wonder, pity, curiosity, and contempt were divided, and so far neutralised.

Harry Fane and Lady Bell were the first people admitted to see Mrs. Sundon in the Haymarket lodgings. She had returned there, and had been suffered to take with her all that was mortal of Gregory Sundon. She had been by his side at the last, along with the chaplain and the prison officials.

Master Charles had managed that for Mrs. Sundon and her dying husband. Master Charles had flown here and there; he had made all the interest that was to be made; he had, during the short time that was allowed him, shown all the metal that lay under his youthful manhood, in being importunate, pertinacious, unrelaxing.

He had won for Mrs. Sundon her poor but invaluable consolation. She had got within the bolts and bars of Newgate, and braved the gaol-fever, and worse than the fever. Her husband's closing eyes had rested on her face; her forgiveness and support had been with him, as pledges of a greater forgiveness, an all-sufficient support; and she had secured the boon of the

poor untenanted body, which she had seen dressed for her in a bridegroom's suit when the spirit was there in its flush of hope and happiness. The tabernacle of clay was hers again to clothe tenderly for the tomb, and to lay to that long sleep—all that was left to it, all it had craved in the end—not where felons lie, but among his own people at Chevely, where his child might stand without shrinking by his grave.

Mrs. Sundon had lived to know that this was the best which could happen on earth to Gregory Sundon, who had been her first love, and to whom truly she had returned in his extremity. She was calm—comforted even to some extent by the fact to which she clung, that he had been arrested and wounded to death in defending himself against what was a false accusation. He had paid down his life as the forfeit of his misdeeds; but of the last misdeed with which he had been charged, he had been comparatively innocent. He had been driven to herd with such men as those false

coiners, but he had not been actively guilty of the crime, though legally it might have been hard to establish the non-participation which stopped short at connivance.

Still, his death occurring accidentally in connection with a crime which he had not committed, was like an atonement for that case of manslaughter, in which Squire Godwin had perished by Mr. Sundon's hand.

"He came back to me after that," Mrs. Sundon said; "and could I reject him in his misery? I had believed that he hated me because of my opposition to his previous sins, and because of my denunciation of them by quitting him. But hatred died, and love revived, for he came back to me at once in his desperate need—as to whom else should he have gone? His deeper guilt and danger made him mine once more. Is it wrong to say so? I cannot help it, for I think it is human nature. I was but a woman, Caro's mother, and his own true love, who had loved him in spite of all—aye, even in spite of himself."

“I love you the better for it, Sunny,” protested Lady Bell.

“There was no more question of infidelity, or treachery, or the squandering of the remnant of a fortune,” said Mrs. Sundon; “for he came to me straight, I tell you, and he only said, ‘My Celia, pity me and help me.’ He did not ask me to have mercy. I believe that he, as well as I, forgot that it was in question between us two. He pled wildly for pardon from Caro, who could not grant it, or tell what it meant, as he kissed his child, and she did not know him, and screamed at the sight of him; but why should he have wasted time in asking pardon of me?”

“That was just before I came back from my visit to London,” said Lady Bell.

“When your coming placed me in great difficulty,” Mrs. Sundon nodded, with a sad smile. “I could not throw my friend upon the world, even though I found I must go up to London, myself, to be near him in his hiding there. In town we could have a

hundred more chances of communication without discovery, and of procuring his flight into foreign parts, a step which the world had anticipated, and so seemed to have rendered more practicable. Of course I could escape suspicion best by meeting his messengers at public places."

"That was why you went so much into public," said Lady Bell, the light breaking in upon her more and more.

"Your being with me contributed to my being unobserved, or at least to the putting observers on a false track," confessed Mrs. Sundon. "Yet I did not think of compromising you seriously, Bell, though I consented to let you share suspicion. You will believe that, and find excuses for me."

"A thousand, Sunny," declared Lady Bell, with all her heart, "only, if you had told me," she hesitated, "I should have stood by you in any circumstances."

"I know that, child, I always knew that. But the secret was not mine alone, and think what a secret it was," she added with

a shudder. "It seemed doing you a greater wrong to impart it to you, than to keep it from you. I expected every week that poor Sundon would be gone. I knew that if it came to discovery, so far as you were concerned, we were safe with you. I knew too that you were in good hands when I made you over to Master Charles. Remember I looked on you as your own mistress. I thought no great mischief could be done for the short time that my strait would last, and every week we were disappointed in the means of reaching the coast, and crossing the channel, for no trust was to be placed in allies tempted by evil doing and misfortune on every side. Oh Bell! not poverty but sin makes man 'acquainted with strange bed-fellows' and drives him and his to resort to strange practices. Now I see how wrong I was, how selfish I had grown in my troubles, and what incalculable harm I might have done to the woman who was like my sister."

“Don’t speak of it, Sunny,” said Lady Bell warmly.

“It is all over, madam,” acknowledged Captain Fane, coming forward and making an effort at magnanimity. He had not known this lady. He could admit the claim of her misfortunes, but he could not yet cancel her offences against him and Lady Bell. Mrs. Sundon had proved a sorry friend to his wife.

Mrs. Sundon recognised the smouldering condemnation in Captain Fane’s tone. That he should continue to bear malice against her was no more than what she deserved, and was but another bitter drop in her cup. It was a different thing, however, if he retained the grain of a grudge, provoked by Mrs. Sundon, against his wife; there should be wanting no supplication or explanation on Mrs. Sundon’s part which could prevent such a seed of evil.

“Captain Fane, I hear that you are an honourable man, and I thank God for it on my dear friend’s account,” Mrs. Sundon

told him wistfully. "Be generous as well as just. Recollect that I did not know your rights—not that even that was my poor Bell's fault, for she would have told me early in your connection, if I could have found the heart to listen."

"No more, Sunny," objected Lady Bell stoutly. "Harry is a man, after all, liable to err like the rest of us. But oh! what should I have been without your fostering care? If Harry does not know that now, you will forgive him his ignorance; he will have the grace to grant it some day."

"This at least I am ready to admit," Captain Fane said less reluctantly and with better grace, "that, after the excesses of passion to which I have given way, which, as you said quite truly, placed Lady Bell in a false position, in the first place, and you might have added, condemned her without a hearing in the second, I have no right to be hard on the shortcomings of my neighbours."

"And you will let me stay with you

at this sad time, Sunny," urged Lady Bell, "you will not punish me for contracting other ties, by driving me from you in the first days of your widowhood. You need not think that he will not give me up to you. You two are not acquainted with each other; which is an apology for your mutual mistakes. But though he has been angry with me, and perhaps he has had cause without my knowing it—farther than that, of course, I am frivolous and foolish compared with him, still I am not frightened to speak up for him. He is not unrelenting and grasping in his righteousness; I can vouch for my husband."

"And I cannot afford to destroy what may remain of Lady Bell's trust," he said with a glow lighting up his grave face and sweetening its severity, "by withholding any proof of confidence in her friend—keep her for me, my dear madam, till you can spare her."

"No, no," declined Mrs. Sundon, looking at them with longing, rueful eyes. "You

are very good, sir, to let me have such an instance of your entire forgiveness; but nothing would induce me to come in again between man and wife. Besides, Bell, though I love you dearly, I would be alone with my husband, my dead husband, whose death has blotted out all his sins and restored him to me, as his life could not have done. You cannot comprehend that, and I hope you never may."

"It shall be as you will, Sunny," submitted Lady Bell, awed.

"The extremes of life have come to us beyond the power of our sympathy to prevent it," said Mrs. Sundon, "and would divide us in these days, though we dwelt on in the same house and clung to each other's arms. There would still be the establishment of your marriage, and the realisation of my widowhood, putting a space as wide as life and death between us. 'The one shall be taken and the other left,'" she quoted dreamily.

Another of those contradictions which

startle us like coincidences, happened at this time in Lady Bell's history.

It would seem to be that in the course of Providence there is another web of destiny underlying that which we dimly see, and in which the same threads are again and again interwoven, not for the purpose of producing similar fortunes, but with the effect of regulating corresponding contrasts.

One's neighbour's joys happen as the season of one's sorrows — an interval of time passes and the same contrast is reproduced a second and third time; the tragedy and the comedy, the wedding and the funeral in the houses which may be next door, or may be those of chief friends occurring simultaneously, and with a curiously accurate repetition.

Within a week of Captain Fane and Lady Bell's reunion, he stopped in reading a paragraph in a newspaper and appealed to her, "Are not the people mentioned here your relations in Warwickshire?"

If so, an awful calamity has befallen them."

He proceeded to read aloud an account of the burning of St. Bevis's, it was suspected by the act of a ruined gentleman of the name of Cholmondeley, who bore an implacable enmity to the family, some of whom had remained inmates of the house, and who had himself perished in the fire which he had raised. The other victims were the sister of the late Squire, Mrs. Die Godwin, and a confidential person connected with the family and known as Mrs. Kitty, who might have been saved had she sought to extricate herself, and not directed her entire energy in the vain attempt to get out Mrs. Die, in company with whom Mrs. Kitty was suffocated.

"Oh, Harry! it is they, and it is very terrible," cried Lady Bell, covering her face.

"He loved her once, after his fashion, as you tell me," said Harry Fane; "such is what poor human love may come to, when

it is without one spark of the divine, when it is of the earth earthy, and is fit to sink into what is altogether animal and devilish."

"Ah! I wish I had been better to them, Harry," Lady Bell bemoaned her follies. "I was so silly and saucy. I wish I had gone to them after I was older and knew more; but I was always a selfish, inconsiderate creature, full only of my own feelings and concerns, small and great. You have much to teach me, Harry Fane, if I am ever to become a large-hearted, disinterested woman."

"Inconsideration in a girl in her teens is not a very rare and unexampled failing, I should imagine," replied Harry, with a smile. "At least I can answer for the common pig-headedness of boys; and if you will forgive me for saying so, don't the bones, as well as the sauce, of the goose match on the whole with the bones of the gander? The capacity for learning is the great thing to be desired in the

scholar, assuming that the teacher is any wiser, which I am not sure, after all, is not a gross and impertinent assumption."

"You know better than that, Harry," Lady Bell told him quite seriously. "But these two poor women to die together, with nobody to help them," she continued to lament piteously.

"In death they were not divided," repeated Harry gently. "Is not that a consolation for the manner of their death, as their love was the one poor solace of their lives?"

CHAPTER XIX.

SIX YEARS LATER.

DURING the next six years, when Lady Bell was sometimes with her husband on foreign stations, sometimes keeping house in England while he was at sea, Harry Fane never again accused of indiscretion his dear and charming wife, who had all the sterling qualities behind her high-bred beauty, cleverness, and sprightliness, whose fondness for him was so patent that it required no separate expression, but passed into every act of that cleverness and sprightliness.

As for Lady Bell, she had returned to her firm conviction, building securely upon it, that her Harry, in spite of his faults

(she was always careful to make that exception lest she should be accused of doting), was the best of mortal men.

Indeed, after the reformer and satirist had given pledges of his human fallibility and toleration by marrying at a disadvantage, and by being in the end properly subject to a pretty, gay, as well as good, young fine lady; when she had softened his bluntness, mellowed his harshness, and put him on better terms with himself and his neighbours, he was a good man.

He vindicated the latent excellence of Lady Bell's choice by the respect with which he and his services were held in his profession, though he did not rise so high in it as more unscrupulous and time-serving officers rose; above all, by the sincere esteem and affection which his intelligence, integrity, and genuine kindness won for him in not a few quarters quite apart from the Admiralty.

None rejoiced more in Harry Fane's having gained Lady Bell, and after gaining

her in his proving worthy of her, than his cousin Lady Sundon rejoiced. Two such rogues had never made a cat's-paw of her, she vowed, but she could stand being made a cat's-paw of when a pretty love marriage was the end of it; and how Lady Bell could have trained Harry to be so placable, complacent, and absolutely gallant, she could not conceive; but she could admire the result, and be sure that Harry did Lady Bell's discipline credit.

For that matter both Harry and Lady Bell had well-nigh forgotten that an interval of time longer than a day, or a misunderstanding graver than a cross look, had passed between Captain Fane's first return after his marriage and his claiming and acknowledging his wife.

Lady Bell loved to go back to the neighbourhood of Lumley and stay there, especially when her husband was at home, and she could carry him down with her to his beloved country, and show him off along with her children to her old friends;

while she made the benefit mutual by showing them off to him.

Lady Bell was particularly pleased to be in the neighbourhood when Master Charles, as Captain Kingscote, was expected home for a breathing space, from the wars, to bring a bride to Nutfield.

Miss Kingscote had kept her promise, and vacated all save a maiden aunt's room in the old house in the Orchard to its new mistress, since Master Charles had been so good as to complete the programme assigned to him, and was taking to himself a wife, a fit complement to his campaigning. This was a wife after Miss Kingscote's heart, with birth, breeding, and some fortune, as well as great beauty, parts, and virtue—altogether an ample dowry to restore the fallen fortunes of the Kingscotes.

“Lawk-a-daisy, Lady Bell, you'll never be able to hold the candle to my sister-in-law,” the good woman told her old companion, in Miss Kingscote's frank exultation.

“No, I'll never be able to hold the

candle to Mrs. Kingscote," assented Lady Bell in confidential resignation.

Master Charles had stolen no march upon his friends, like that of which Lady Bell had been guilty ; but it had been the wish of both bride and bridegroom that the couple should go away by themselves one summer morning, be quietly married in the nearest country church, and come riding home a few days afterwards, attended only by their servants, like any comfortable couple of ten or twenty years' standing. The arrangement had become not unusual in those days of decided re-action from splendid wedding shows and public bridal rejoicings.

Thus, though Lady Bell was aware of what had taken place, and who might be expected to look in upon her in passing presently, she was coolly at work in the familiar garden of her former home of Summerhill, which Captain Fane had been lucky enough to rent for these six months.

Lady Bell was assisted in her gardening

operations by the dainty little daughter of a friend, and by her own small son and heir. The three were tracing the outline of a ship with low-growing herbs.

“I once began it before,” Lady Bell was expatiating to her young allies, “but I could not finish it. I am sure to do it now with such a pair of subs. It is papa’s ship, Pellew, but it is not the *Centurion*, it is the dear old *Thunderbomb*. Unfortunately it can no longer be a surprise to the ship’s captain, for you see this is his idle time, if he were not so busy a man always, when he is apt to turn up. There is one thing, he will give us a few hints for the bowsprit and the stern, on which I am a little shaky. No, thank you, my boy, I cannot take your authority instead, or agree to your personating the bow, as Bottom the Weaver represented a wall, and to Caro’s standing for the stern ;—not though I could nail your restless feet still. See, there comes the ship’s captain, and there, I declare, they are with him !”

Lady Bell flung down her tools and materials, as she had done on a former occasion, and could not run fast enough to meet her friends.

There was Master Charles in broad-shouldered and bronzed manhood, not without his scars, one of which caused him to halt slightly as he walked ; but his soldier's credit was worth them, and at this moment he did not look so sober and subdued as he had often looked when the freshness of his first manhood was on his cheek, and when his step was well nigh as light as Lady Bell's.

He was wearing his honours modestly, but one of them was a bridegroom's triumph, and the joy of the true bridegroom is proverbial.

It is only the worldly wisdom of the present day, which delights to throw cold water on such natural, warrantable joy, and to represent "the poor craven bridegroom" as full of backward looks, regrets for his lost loves, his perished ideal, and

his vanished freedom, together with mortal shame at his first appearance before the world in the humdrum character of "Benedict the married man."

But Master Charles had the high reward of winning his first and last love, and the deep satisfaction of clasping his ideal. Mrs. Kingscote, who had been Mrs. Sundon, standing there beside him, awaiting his wishes like any good wife, calling him "lord and master," and no longer "Master Charles," but familiarly "Charlie," had been less fortunate in her day.

But she did no wrong to her first love, Gregory Sundon, in giving him a worthier successor. Gregory Sundon had fallen from his place and forfeited his goods in this world; another man had inherited what was forfeited, and that man's gain could not be counted the prodigal's loss. It is not here that there can be a restoration of all things.

There was ample wealth left in the mind and heart of the woman, still young in

years and nobly beautiful in face, to reward the loyal and faithful friend and lover, and to endow any man. Without doubt, Master Charles held himself as well endowed beyond hope or desert.

“Master Charles,” Lady Bell was calling him, “I wonder if you know as much difference in me as I know in you; but then the advantages are all on your side.”

“Pshaw! Lady Bell, have you begun already to laugh at me?” cried Master Charles.

“I am gone off as a belle and a toast—forgive my vanity,” persisted Lady Bell, “and am drifting into an old married woman, while you have only grown from a likely young fellow into a man who might be a general, or the Mayor of Lumley, or the Sheriff of the county any day. Why, Sunny, your captain looks as formidable as my captain, and you know how I am kept in order.”

“Her speech shows it,” said Captain Fane.

“I have suspected it, Bell,” said Sunny, “and only think what a bad example for Charlie !”

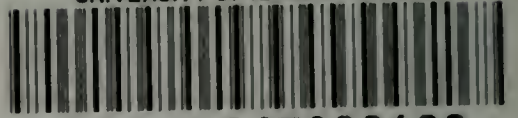
“We’ll club our resources, my dear,” announced Lady Bell, “we’ll tame these men of war, render them as domestic as dogs and cats, and call our houses our own, after all. How well you are looking, Sunny ! How setting the white veil is to your hat !”

Then as Mrs. Kingscote turned aside to forget every other thing in the kiss of her little daughter, Lady Bell said enthusiastically to all whom it might concern, “Caro is a darling, but she will never pull caps with her mother. I appeal to Captain Kingscote. At the same time I trust, Harry, that our children may do us as much credit as that child does her mother’s cares and mine. Ah, Caro !” she ended by softly apostrophising the little girl, who was out of hearing, “of what plans and projects you were once the central figure in these very grounds of

Summerhill ! Yes, you may well go up and pay your duty very sweetly and prettily, in the midst of your agitation, to your new father, who has tossed you as a baby in his arms many a time, and who is now wondering over and admiring you. You will never miss your own poor father now, as you might have missed him, with a girl's vague longing. Your mother has done the best thing for you, as well as for herself, in giving you a good father and herself a good husband."

THE END.

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